CHAPTER 2

Boston is a city of neighborhoods

Transit-centered urban villages

Charm bracelets

Affordable housing for all

Community gateways and markers

2.

Boston is a city of neighborhoods

Boston's neighborhoods make up the heart of the city. From the time of Boston's earliest development on the old Shawmut peninsula, the city's character has come from the development of dozens of distinct communities with unique geographic, economic, and social qualities. Most of the neighborhoods that give Boston such great variety and vitality started out as independent cities and towns before agreeing to be annexed to Boston. Each of Boston's communities carries forth the character that originated in earlier days as independent towns and cities, or the processes of master planning that marked major landfills.

Geography, infrastructure, and major developments have always been the defining characteristics of the neighborhoods. Waterways like the Charles River, Neponset River, and Stony Brook gave rise to mills and manufacturing. The Back Bay and Fens were designed de novo upon landfill that was nestled into the Emerald Necklace park system. Charlestown, the North End, and South Boston developed around sea-based industries. Communities like South Boston, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and West Roxbury emerged as "streetcar suburbs" during the days of horse-drawn cars. Logan Airport was built on landfill that consolidated islands in the neighborhood now known as East Boston. Allston-Brighton grew around railroad yards and universities. The look and feel of Boston's neighborhoods are often so distinctive that people identify themselves as residents of Roxbury, Hyde Park, or other communities rather than Boston.

In recent years, a number of community-driven efforts have improved the character of neighborhoods all over Boston. A broad coalition arose in the 1970s to defeat the proposal to build a new Southwest Expressway through the South End, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain; in its place was developed the new Orange Line for rapid transit and the Southwest Corridor Park. All over the city, community development corporations have developed thousands of units of housing to promote affordable and diverse neighborhoods. Gardens and urban wilds and greenways have sprung up all over the city as a result of cooperation between community groups, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Watershed organizations and other civic groups, in cooperation with government agencies and major institutions, have joined forces to clean up Boston's rivers and develop exciting amenities along those natural spaces. Old buildings have been rehabilitated for housing, artist studios, social service centers, and office and commercial uses. Volunteer groups have fixed bike trails and parks, identified new planning visions for waterfront vistas, and fought to improve public transit service. All of these activities begin in the neighborhoods, where people come face to face with the problems and possibilities of urban life.

Boston's strong neighborhood identity offers the foundation for one of the nation's most dynamic and diverse cities, but it also poses serious challenges. Connections from the neighborhoods to the assets of the rest of the city are often inadequate. Many neighborhoods in the heart of the city, such as Roxbury and Dorchester, do not feel a full sense of ownership of the Boston Harbor waterfront – even when they are just a mile or so away from the waterfront. Other neighborhoods feel detached from Downtown, Franklin Park and Boston Nature Center, the

cultural institutions of the Fenway, Stony Brook Reservation, the John F. Kennedy Library, or the National Museum of Afro-American Artists. The problem is equal parts information and logistics. Because the city lacks a comprehensive system of orientation to the city's many attractions and events – and because businesses and the visitor industry tends to highlight the Downtown and environs in promotional materials – many people simply do not know about Boston's extraordinary places in the neighborhoods. When they do know about these places, getting there can be difficult.

Boston's neighborhoods face another "connections" challenge as well. Many of the resources within neighborhoods – parks and playgrounds, schools, libraries, community centers, bicycle networks, gardens, historic sites, shopping districts – are not connected to each other in any visible way. In order for these places to meet the challenges of residents and merchants, they need to be brought into a stronger relationship with each other. Parks should extend the campus of the schools. Libraries should be an extension of community centers and social-service centers. Transit stations should anchor neighborhood businesses. Bicycle networks should enhance parks, playgrounds, and business centers. Gardens should become extensions of parks and playgrounds, residential blocks, and neighborhood streets. When these resources are truly connected – with sidewalks and other paths, landscaping, signage and gateways, and building frontage – then the neighborhoods will be more "whole" and will offer greater opportunity for residents, merchants, and visitors.

When improving Boston's neighborhoods, it is important to know that they all need the same basic building blocks, but that these building blocks need to be put together according to the unique character of each neighborhood. The building blocks include a variety of housing types for people of all backgrounds and income levels, mass transit connections to the whole city, good schools and cultural institutions, parks for people of all ages, and exciting public places with diverse activities and a pleasant "walkable" feel. Each neighborhood needs to build these elements into its spaces in its own way. Neighborhoods are organic places that depend on adapting basic needs to particular circumstances. Strong design standards and commitment to infrastructure investment are essential, but also need to be shaped by the people who live and work in the neighborhoods.

Principles of planning for a good neighborhood

Good city neighborhoods work when they combine a fine-grained character of the street and the bold connections with the life of the larger city. In community meetings across the city, residents expressed the following principles about neighborhood design:

A good neighborhood has a diverse range of educational, recreational, and cultural spaces. The more places people have to go, the greater their opportunity for fulfillment and identification with each other as neighbors and citizens. All people – singles, couples, families, seniors – need opportunities to pursue educational, recreational, cultural, and spiritual opportunities. Institutions that offer such opportunities should be supported since they help to create a civic spirit that strengthens the overall quality of life. Streetscape improvements, parks and natural areas, landscaping, signage, historic spaces, and façade improvements can help to connect diverse community resources.

All communities should be designed with walkable streets and sidewalks that connect residential, community, and business spaces. A good neighborhood makes it easy for residents to

develop relations with their many different neighbors – nearby residents, businesses, cultural institutions, schools, churches, parks and community centers, social service centers, and the like. Visiting a friend, obtaining goods and services, seeing a play or hearing a concert, checking up on a child's educational progress, enjoying recreational opportunities, and getting a checkup should be accessible by foot or transit. Such diverse activities tend to be available in communities with good design. Good design requires streets and sidewalks that are seamless, safe, and comfortable for people of all ages. People should be able to find there way around the neighborhood to gain access to all of its resources.

A community needs to have a wide range of homes for people at of income levels and social backgrounds. Housing directly shapes the character of the neighborhood. A diverse housing stock – with single-family, multi-family, and apartment buildings – provides places for people of all income levels and stages of life. Not all neighborhoods can offer all kinds of housing, but they should offer housing for as many different kinds of people as possible. By assessing which groups need which kinds of housing, the City can develop a coherent longterm strategy to address the problem of access and affordability in all neighborhoods. While housing is fundamentally a matter of providing shelter for residents, it is also an integral part of community-building. Therefore, the design of housing should strengthen the urban character of the community. Suburban styles of housing should be avoided, particularly in neighborhoods with longstanding urban qualities such as density, mixed-use development, multifamily dwellings, and access to public transit. Housing should strengthen the character of the overall community, rather than isolate residents from their community.

Neighborhood centers should be convenient to transit connections to places of work and play across the city and region. No neighborhood is an island unto itself; people in neighborhoods need efficient access to the many resources and activities in the city and region. Public transportation should be the centerpiece of community building. It should be easy for someone to take a subway, trolley, or bus to economic, social, and cultural activities all over the city. It should also be easy to walk and bicycle in every neighborhood of the city. People who prefer automobile transportation should be accommodated with a street network that provides movement with a minimum of congestion. Car travel outside the neighborhood should be channeled into a citywide and regional street system apart from neighborhood streets.

Residents need direct access to a vibrant local economy that offers jobs and a full range of goods and services to all residents. Despite the growing power of malls and catalogue and internet shopping, people still need access to goods and services locally – groceries, clothing stores, book and stationery stores, hardware stores, banks, convenience stores, restaurants, coffee shops and taverns, and health care centers. These places have not just economic importance, but are vital to the social and cultural life of the community. Where people meet to exchange goods and services, they also forge social bonds that strengthen the identity and cohesiveness of the community.

INITIATIVE: TRANSIT-CENTERED URBAN VILLAGES

Throughout most of American urban history, cities have developed around lively "nodes" of activity at key transportation stations and interchanges. All manner of activity – retail stores, service providers, civic and religious functions, housing – cluster around a port or transit station because of the convenience and access offered by transportation systems. This style of development creates a density that enables the area to support a great diversity of activities. It

also makes public transportation a viable option for people in the area and beyond. Transit villages are also more affordable for residents and businesses because they free them from the expenses and spaces required by cars. Health and safety benefits are also significant since they encourage walking, reduce air and noise pollution, and eliminate dangerous automobile speeds. Perhaps the greatest beneficiary is civic health. Because transit centers encourage people to venture into the public realm, the community benefits when neighbors get to know each other and look after each other's concerns.

Vision

Over the next generation, Boston will build on the potential of its extensive transit system and transform the areas around its major transportation stops and stations into model urban villages. These villages will offer every convenience and amenity of urban living, beginning with an attractive and efficient means of public transit to all sections of the city and region. To encourage transit ridership, every village should provide lively, diverse, and walkable places. The urban villages should offer attractive stations, a diverse array of goods and services, special civic spaces from parks and galleries, and places to meet friends and neighbors. A well-designed village makes the neighborhood a better setting for residents, merchants, and visitors – and connects to the other vital spaces of Boston's neighborhoods.

Assets and opportunities

One of Boston's greatest assets is its **existing public transportation infrastructure**. All across the city, communities have developed around transit stations. Boston is also one of the few American cities in recent years to build a whole new subway line and is contemplating the construction of new lines in the future.

Even where there are no stations to anchor public transit use, there are many **clusters of activity** that could develop into dynamic transit nodes. They differ in their economic and residential density, streetscape and urban design, and transit access. Transit improvements, land-use planning, and enhancements of urban design can improve their overall livability, legibility, safety, comfort, and convenience. *[see MAP of activity centers]*

The last decade has been a time of much **public investment and planning**. The City has successfully instituted a "boulevards program" to improve the streetscape and urban design of the city's great streets. The State is developing plans for new transit lines including the Silver Line, the Urban Ring; and plans for redesigned and reconfigured stations including several Red Line stations in Dorchester, Yawkey Station in the Fenway, and Airport Station in East Boston. *[see SIDE trans projects underway, Chapter 4]*

Private investment is also spurring the potential for transit-oriented development. A strong demand for housing all over the city offers new possibilities for increasing density near transit stations that is necessary to increase ridership and support local businesses. A renewed interest in the retail opportunities of many long-neglected neighborhoods – like Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan – also creates new opportunities strengthening business districts all over the city. The city already has exceeded its goal for building 2,000 new units of housing by the year 2000.

Federal mandates and incentives to reduce pollution and encourage transit ridership could also help to strengthen the transit system. The Clinton Administration's Livable Communities agenda provides grants through the Federal Transit Administration's Transportation and

Community and System Preservation Pilot (TCSP) program. The Intermodal-Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and its successor TEA-21 provide opportunities for trading in some Federal highway dollars for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements. *[see SIDE ISTEA TEA-21, Chapter 4]*

Boston benefits from a number of viable **models for transit-centered development**. The Boston areas contains several models of good transit center design, such as Kenmore Square in Boston, Coolidge Corner in Brookline, Central Square in Cambridge, and Davis Square in Somerville. In these areas, well-designed transit stations, and strong streetscape standards and incentives have enabled public and private actors to create dense, mixed-use communities that are popular for visitors as well as residents. *[see SIDE TOD successes]*

The existence of **vacant parcels** near many transit stations gives the City ground upon which to build housing, mixed-use commercial buildings, and community facilities that are accessible to the T. *[see MAP of Grove Hall area vacant parcels]*

The Boston Zoning Code offers the possibility of creating **special overlay districts** that would mandate development that strengthens the character of transit nodes. Such districts are critical to set development standards that encourage a density and scale of development that fosters lively mixed-use districts that make transit use attractive and convenient.

Barriers and challenges

Unlike in the early part of the century, today's commercial, residential, and community activity is **not clustered around transit stations**. Today's automobile-oriented development patterns do not typically allow for sufficient concentrations of commercial activity and residential units for transit to be a convenient option for local residents.

Automobile dominance fosters a demand for more parking, which encourages more cars, which then creates greater congestion. Without a concerted effort to make walking and transit more attractive for people in the neighborhoods – and to reduce overall reliance on car ownership – the tendency towards automobile-oriented design will continue. The number of automobiles registered in Boston has almost doubled in the last generation, from increased from 156,000 in 1970 to 303,226 in 1999, according to the state Registry of Motor Vehicles. More than 600,000 cars come into Boston each day.

At many transit areas there is a **lack of supporting infrastructure** for transit-based urban villages. Transit nodes need wide sidewalks, pocket parks, restroom facilities, places to buy coffee and newspapers, places to sit, and additional amenities such as signage and public art. As Boston 400's preliminary study of activity centers shows, critical nodes throughout the city lack many of the basic building blocks of a strong pedestrian- and transit-oriented community. *[SIDE from Transit-oriented Activity Centers consultant to come] [see SIDE elements of a TOD]*

The **pattern of land use near many transit nodes is also inadequate**. Many existing uses encourage or require automobile access, undermining the pedestrian atmosphere. Over time, these spaces must be reoriented to target pedestrian and transit customers. When the businesses cannot be separated from automobile access – for example, gas stations and car washes – they should be designed to provide the best possible environment for pedestrians. *[see MAP of Good TOD vs. Bad TOD]*

Uncoordinated development is seen as the norm in many neighborhoods. Rather than considering how the larger social context might strengthen individual development projects – and vice versa – the assumption is that projects are to be judged separately from that context. In

the absence of master plans for transit nodes, land use evolves parcel by parcel and the development projects often contradict each other. Uncoordinated development results in an unbalanced array of goods and services, poor definition of parks and other civic spaces, and inadequate provision of benches and other street furniture.

There are also **public, institutionalized barriers** to density. Many federal and state programs and regulations prescribe suburban-style development for roads, schools, and other developments that undermine efforts at transit-centered urban villages. Federal and state agencies set standards for schools and other public facilities that are usually more appropriate for suburban locations. Massachusetts regulations, for example, require 20 acres for new school buildings. Federal road standards can create some of the greatest hindrances to transit-centered development. The so-called "Green Book," the standard guide for road work devised by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials, emphasizes the need to maximize travel speeds for automobiles rather than attending to the safety and needs of pedestrians and bicyclists. In recent years, state transportation officials have been more attentive to the need for roads to serve more than cars, but the pro-car bias is deeply embedded into a wide variety of programs for transportation, housing, office development, and retailing.

Many **private actors** also do not contribute to transit-centered mixed-use development. Banks and lending institutions require businesses to build suburban-style parking lots as a condition for making loans. Fannie Mae, the federally chartered finance institution, favors single-family homes over multi-family dwellings – undermining the potential for dense community development near transit nodes. Because they rely on Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, the Federal Home Loan Bank, and other secondary mortgage companies to buy their loans, many banks and insurance companies are likewise reticent to encourage people to invest in inner-city locations.

Actions

At the state level . . .

- **Develop state legislation to create special financing districts near transit stations.** Business improvement districts, like the one proposed for Downtown Crossing and Washington Street, have provided efficient means to finance the improvement of specific districts. Tax-increment financing is another tool that cities use to pay for public improvements. TIF districts, used in 44 states across the country, allow the city to issue bonds to borrow money for physical infrastructure and other community development projects. Those bonds are paid off with the extra taxes that are collected when the property values in the areas increase because of the physical improvements. *[see SIDE Washington Street, Chapter 4]*
- **Encourage the MBTA to redesign, rehabilitate, and develop its stations.** State legislators and community groups have requested that the MBTA begin a process of redesigning transit stations and programming existing stations with commercial and cultural activities.
  - The Charles/Mass General Hospital station has been the focus of a major community redesign effort. The redesign will make the station more accessible and connect it better to nearby streets, institutions, and the Charles River Esplanade.
  - Red Line stations at Ashmont, Fields Corner, and Shawmut are among the most prominent stations in need of redesign and refurbishment.

- Well-designed stations like the Orange Line's Jackson Square and Green Street should be programmed to fulfill their purpose as community convenience centers as well as transit nodes.
- Redesign should begin with attention to the needs of transit users. All stations should provide create well-marked paths, places to sit inside and outside the turnstiles, good lighting, information about train service, and places to buy newspapers, coffee, and other basic goods and services.
- Redesign should go beyond these basic elements when possible to include the placement of public art and places for civic activities like voter registration. Many stations could also offer storefronts for lease. These spaces could be rented at below-market rates to community groups, startup businesses, or social services such as day care.

- **Develop the MBTA-owned surplus lands near transit stations and invest rents in better service.** The MBTA is one of the largest landholders in Massachusetts. The MBTA should be encouraged to develop a longterm development plan for each of its properties. This development plan should be made with extensive public participation. By developing its properties strategically, with the goal of strengthening the communities surrounding T stations, the authority would increase transit ridership and improve its overall performance. Development strategies should follow the principles of the urban village and provide pleasant places for pedestrians, a mix of activities, residential clustering, and strong design standards that create the "outdoor living room" that is inviting to locals and visitors alike. A careful longterm development plan could yield significant sources of new revenue to finance a wide range of transit improvements. The plan should be made public – with updated information posted on the Internet – so that others considering investments will understand the MBTA's intentions for their properties.

At the city level . . .

- **Adopt Boston 400's priorities for transit-centered development to guide the MBTA's longterm planning and development.** In its work with Wallace Floyd Design Group, Boston 400 will identify three major activity centers for development as transit centers and an additional 12 activity centers for longterm transit planning. The three major activity centers should provide the core priorities for transportation and development funding in the next ten years. The other 12 centers should provide a longterm agenda for transit improvements in the next generation. *[SIDE from Transit-oriented Activity Centers consultant to come]*
- **Establish overlay districts to coordinate transit-based development.** To protect and enhance areas of the city with extraordinary qualities, the City should take advantage of its special zoning tools. In an overlay district, a set of development and design regulations are added to the existing zoning regulations for a given location. The overlay district makes sense if the area has a character unique to the geographic area. Many cities and towns have established overlay districts for rivers, mountain areas, transit nodes, areas vulnerable to storms, historic neighborhoods, and business and cultural areas. In these sections of the city, the resources and assets are considered so special and particular to the place that the ordinary course of planning and development is considered unwise. Special circumstances require special tools. Only comprehensive planning systems can provide a context to enhance these areas' special qualities while allowing appropriate use and development.

- Add a transit-overlay district to the Boston Zoning Code. A transit overlay district would establish strict standards for design and development within a specified radius of the transit station, probably one-half to one mile. Such standards would set the design of streets and sidewalks, setbacks of buildings, size and bulk of buildings, allowed and forbidden uses for properties, standards for parking lots, and design and placement of housing. A transit overlay district would create a predictable context for development, protect and enhance the community, and promote public transit. A transit overlay district would also include goals for density that would guide development decisions over the course of implementation.
- Coordinate transit-centered development with the "concentrated development centers" adopted by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

- **Define standards for vehicular access to and around the city's urban villages.** Cars have a place in urban villages, but their volume should be limited to ensure safety and clean air for pedestrians and transit users. Through the Boston Transportation Department's Access Boston 2000-2010 comprehensive planning initiative, the City should establish clear standards for vehicular access to the neighborhood's urban villages.
  - Incorporate traffic calming into design standards for streets in urban villages. Traffic calming elements include street lanes as narrow as 11 feet, chicanes (barriers along the side of the road), neck-downs (extensions of the corners of sidewalks into the street), and speed tables (crosswalks built flush with the elevation of the sidewalk at intersections), and textured paving.
  - Ensure that a variety of vehicular services are available to make connections from transit stations to people's final destinations. The provision of vans, jitneys, shuttle buses, and other systems would extend the convenience of transit use to those who live or work beyond the walking distance to a transit station.
  - Design and locate parking and other large-scale facilities to the rear of buildings so that the street does not impose long stretches of undeveloped or inactive spaces.
  - Enforce regulations against idling of buses, taxis, and cars to prevent unnecessary air pollution.
  - Enforce regulations against double-parking and street loading of goods to clear the roads for public transit and other vehicles. Trucks bringing cargo into the area should be directed to loading docks in the rear of buildings whenever possible.
- **Provide building and development incentives.** The design of buildings and community facilities and the mix of activities dramatically shapes the character of the life of a community.
  - Provide incentives for good urban design. Buildings that extend to the sidewalk to create a "street wall" give definition to public spaces. A variety of small storefronts create a lively street atmosphere and help orient people to the places where they can find a wide range of goods and services. Buildings with clearly articulated edges and interior spaces, but which are also visible from the sidewalk, attract passersby and become an attraction in themselves.
  - Provide incentives to encourage a broad mix of businesses. Many communities with the potential to become strong transit nodes are undermined by an inadequate variety of goods and services. To attract a wide range of people, business districts need to offer a wide range of goods and services. Districts overwhelmed with fast-food stores or fashion salons do not attract as many visitors as districts that also offer newspaper stands, coffee shops, restaurants, convenience stores, art galleries, hardware stores, and other retail outlets. The

City should consider offering tax breaks or building-improvement grants for a period of one or two years to businesses that offer new kinds of goods and services.

- Provide incentives to concentrate residential development around transit stations. A density of 12 units per acre within 1,300 feet of the station (one-quarter mile) and 9 units per acre beyond that radius is necessary to create a critical mass of residents that can support reliable transit service and a variety of local businesses and services. The use of density bonuses and creative housing designs can improve the overall character of communities and assure that residents have access to a wide range of social services and public amenities. It can also reduce the overall cost of housing by taking advantage of lower parking requirements and providing efficiencies of scale.

- **Provide bicycle connections and facilities.** All transit nodes should provide convenient routes and facilities for bicyclists. All of the following strategies might not be possible at each urban village, but should be considered whenever streets and stations are being redesigned.

  - Build a network bicycle routes and paths throughout the city. Dedicated bike paths and striped lanes on boulevards would make it easier for bicyclists to get to transit stations, where they could continue their journey by subway, trolley, or bus.

  - Provide facilities such as bicycle racks and lockers at transit stations to make bicycling to stations more convenient.

  - Integrate bicycle-friendly standards into street and sidewalk design standards. Traffic calming is essential to integrating bicycles into the stream of traffic. Road surfaces should be smooth and drains designed to avoid the problem of bike wheels getting stuck in gaps. Intersections are especially important because of the potential for danger when cars turn and bikes move forward.

  - Provide signage and street markings that guide both motorist and bicyclist.

At the institutional level. . .

- **Establish utility cars and other automobile experiments.** Ultimately, the decision to take transit or drive a car depends on convenience. Making public transit efficient, safe, and affordable is only half the battle. The other half of the battle is providing access to cars without encouraging unnecessary levels of vehicle-ownership. One approach to providing the convenience of cars without overwhelming an area with congestion is the utility vehicle. In an arrangement similar to a food cooperative, members of car clubs would have access to a wide range of cars in a nearby garage when they wanted but would not have to own their own cars. A person living near a transit node could get to work and take care of many errands without a car – but have access to cars when taking a weekend trip, making a trip to a supermarket or lumber yard, or spending a night on the town. *[see SIDE utility cars]*

- **Encourage businesses and major institutions to increase their efforts to provide transportation management programs.** A number of major employers have already undertaken special efforts to encourage their workers to use public transportation or walk to work. Many medical institutions, Downtown businesses, and universities offer incentives for workers and students to buy monthly passes for public transit. Many businesses and institutions also offer special shuttle service from major transit stations to employment centers. Still other institutions provide incentives to live within walking distance of the place of employment. Some institutions even offer free emergency taxi service to employees who use transit. All of these efforts should be expanded. In addition, the institutions should develop systems for coordinating

the non-public transit and shuttle systems and make those systems available to non-employees. These systems can serve as important supplementary transit systems that help reduce automobile usage and congestion throughout the city.

INITIATIVE: CHARM BRACELETS

The essence of good neighborhood is the human-scale connections among a greater diversity of places and activities. A neighborhood should offer a full range of diversions – shopping opportunities, parks and playgrounds, historic buildings, cultural activities, schools and health centers – and provide connections to the rest of the city. The richness of neighborhood resources stems from their variety and linkages between them. The civic spirit of the neighborhood is reflected in the care that residents pay to the maintenance and enhancement of their common places. To make parks and civic places accessible to all, neighborhoods should connect them into legible systems that show the connections between the spaces at they same time their celebrate their diversity. *[see SIDE Mission Hill charm bracelet] [see MAP of Mission Hill charm bracelet] [see SIDE charm bracelets]*

Vision

In the next generation, Boston should adapt the concept of the Emerald Necklace to the neighborhoods by building "charm bracelets" in all communities. The charm bracelets would connect and relate the dozens of special places in Boston's neighborhoods – parks and gardens, civic buildings, retail districts, transit stations, historic and cultural resources, schools and churches, and public art. Build partnerships with communities around the city to…

Assets and opportunities

Boston's neighborhoods provide great building blocks to create charm bracelets all over the city. Literally hundreds of great community spaces – parks and playgrounds, gardens and urban wilds, schools, libraries, community centers museums and historic sites, churches, health centers, and day care centers are scattered throughout the city neighborhoods.

A number of **special planning districts** – such as 16 Boston Main Streets districts, 40 Schoolyards Initiatives sites, 10 boulevard projects, 10 economic development areas, and 7 historic districts – offer a promising foundation for further community enhancement. These programs provide a model of community partnerships for improvements of public spaces.

Many City departments plan to make **significant public investments** over the next several years as part of their regular capital improvements programs. In the next 30 years, Boston Public Schools will either rebuild or significantly renovate each of its more than 130 school buildings. The Parks Department this year adopted its latest five-year plan, which outlines specific improvements in the natural environments of neighborhoods across the city. The ongoing Harborwalk initiative seeks to create 43 miles of walkable and bikable spaces along the Boston Harbor from East Boston to the Neponset River. Smaller projects, such as the new Peace Park in Roxbury and community gardens all over the city offer significant improvements in once-vacant areas.

One of the most promising developments of recent years is the **redevelopment of historic buildings** as part of a larger strategy of community development. Over the past few years, factories have been converted to artist live/work space, schools have been converted to elderly housing, and a brewery was converted to an office building. With aggressive funding and creative design strategies, historic buildings could offer a dynamic way to improve housing and community development across the city. The Patrick Meehan Carriage Factory on Green Street

in Jamaica Plain has been rehabilitated for loft housing and artist work spaces. The Michaelangelo School in the North End will be rehabilitated by 2000 for elder housing and a Freedom Trail Visitors Center. The Longfellow School in Roslindale was converted to senior housing in 1997. The Stop and Shop bakery on Causeway Street at Bulfinch Triangle will be converted to housing and commercial space starting in 1999. The Dearborn School in Roxbury was converted into 42 units of affordable housing in 1999. Family Services of Greater Boston, previously located on Beacon Hill, in 1999 completed the renovation of the Roxbury Brewing Company building on Heath Street in Mission Hill for use as its headquarters building.

In addition, Boston boasts a number of **major transit crossroads** that could strengthen the identity and legibility of the neighborhoods through Boston 400's transit-centered urban villages initiative.

One of the most important areas of concern is with neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Under the leadership of Commissioner Justine Liff, the Parks Department has undertaken an aggressive **effort to improve local parks** that do not meet the needs of their communities. *[see SIDE neighborhood park improvements]* As these efforts continue, it is important to outline the many different functions that neighborhood parks fulfill for residents and visitors. *[see SIDE neighborhood park elements]* Over time, residents should identify shortcomings in their park facilities to develop projects to add to enhance those facilities.

Barriers and challenges

While many neighborhoods have parks that need redesign and other enhancements, **some communities lack adequate park space** altogether. Although as a city Boston almost meets The National Recreation and Park Association's standards for access to open space – Boston has 9.6 acres of parks, gardens, and urban wilds per 1,000 people, and the standard is 10 per 1,000 – the city's neighborhoods vary dramatically in their access to local green spaces. The neighborhoods with the least park space are Chinatown, with 0.6 acres per 1,000 residents, and the South End, with 1.4 acres per 1,000 residents while the neighborhood with the greatest access to park space is Hyde Park, with 26.3 acres per 1,000 residents.

Uncoordinated uses, styles, and standards fragment many streetscapes. The Boston Main Streets program has developed a model for bringing together both public and private actors to enhance business districts throughout the city. Streets and pedestrian pathways do not need to conform to a single standard of design; in fact, such homogenization would undermine the diversity of the community. But some basic standards for streets, sidewalks, frontage, and signage could highlight the relatedness of diverse spaces.

Another difficulty is that many private and nonprofit institutions – such as hospitals, churches, and health clinics – make **institutional investments without an eye to the public realm**. Often the designs of such buildings are so functional that they do not accommodate more civic activities that might improve both the institutions and the community. As health centers have become the common space of many communities, for example, it would be beneficial to all if their lobbies and meeting spaces were designed in a way that could accommodate community activities. With minor improvements, the front lawns of many institutions could serve more public functions. Of course, such facilities would need to be protected from legal liability if they allowed public use of their spaces.

The federal and state governments sometimes contribute to the disconnected feel of the community when they build **large public projects that do not fit into the community**. In many

cases, builders of these public facilities are simply following their agencies' design regulations. In other cases, governmental agencies are exempt from following Boston's zoning and design review regulations.

Legal restrictions often limit the options of public, nonprofit, and private institutions. When property owners are held liable for incidents that occur on their grounds, they are unlikely to allow outsiders to use those grounds. For example, many parks adjacent to public schools are not available for class use because of the school's liability exposure.

Actions

At the city level . . .

Develop a citywide system for implementing the neighborhood park plans. Neighborhood by neighborhood, over a 20-year period, use neighborhood input and professional landscape design to build or renovate all of the city's local parks. Establish a schedule for neighborhood park and public-realm improvements that require neighborhoods to establish clear priorities for their enhancement. Use the neighborhood plans and citywide schedule to create coherent networks of parks ("bracelets") that connect with the City's larger systems of parks ("necklaces"), boulevards, business districts, and civic spaces. City officials should invite community organizations to convene to identify which individual community resources might be linked into a seamless system of civic spaces.

Establish incentive programs. The City should appoint an official to work with neighborhoods to articulate their visions for charm bracelets and to coordinate existing programs to assure that they foster the goal of the charm bracelets. The charm bracelet concept could be implemented in part through other incentive programs. The mission of Main Streets could be expanded to include investments outside their specific business districts. The Boston Schoolyards Initiative could be extended to the repair and redesign of other public spaces connected with public buildings, such as community centers, health clinics, day care, libraries, and the like. The effort to plant 2,000 new trees all over the city in the next year under the Boston 2000 program could be coordinated with the charm bracelet initiative. The Boston Boulevards Initiative and other public-realm programs of the Department of Public Works could be coordinated with the charm bracelet program.

Improve inter-agency coordination. To bring together the many elements of the charm bracelet, agency coordination of public improvement projects needs to be improved. Agencies need to develop a system to coordinate street redesign, park improvements, school and library enhancements, and other projects that relate to the built environment. The City should appoint a Capital Improvements Coordination Manager to track all of the projects in the neighborhoods. This manager, operating in the Mayor's Office, would develop a database that tracks projects from conception to completion and would also bring together project managers and people from relevant City agencies.

Challenges for private institutions include . . .

Improve institutional campuses and open them to greater public use. Many private institutions – universities, hospitals, health centers, museums and performance spaces, places of worship, hotels, meeting halls – play an important role in shaping the public realm. These institutions should be encouraged to open their campuses, where appropriate, to broader public use and enjoyment. The grounds of these institutions should be inviting to all people in the

community. Sometimes, creating an inviting public face involves nothing more than providing places to sit, tearing down an ugly fence, or landscaping the property. At other times, the effort to open these institutional spaces could involve redesign of walking paths, parking lots, and sections of buildings.

Challenges for community organizations include . . .

Identify what civic resources the charm bracelets should connect. The people who live and work in a neighborhood possess the greatest knowledge of the community's many resources. The maps located in the Appendix of this book provide detailed information about the resources of each activity center in the city. But people who live and work in the neighborhoods need to get together to determine which civic spaces they wish to bring into their charm bracelets and what tools they wish to use to achieve their goals.

Work with the Parks Department to redesign parks, playgrounds, and gardens. People who live and work in the neighborhoods best understand the patterns of use – and non-use – of parks and natural spaces. Working with the Parks Department, community members should identify the parks, playgrounds, and gardens in need of redesign and other improvements. Much of this work has already been done as part of the Parks Department FiveYear Plan mandated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Parks Department should create mechanisms to translate those visions into action over the next five to ten years.

INITIATIVE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL

Housing is the bedrock of all communities. Just as neighborhoods anchor people in the city, homes anchor people in their neighborhoods. Housing not only provides shelter and a place to tend to family life, but it also roots people in their communities. Housing offers access to employment, educational, recreational, and civic activities. The styles and locations of houses and apartment buildings give communities their distinctive appearance and character. In the ideal situation, every neighborhood would offer a wide range of housing types to meet the needs and budgets of all household types, such as college students and young singles, couples, families, retirees and senior citizens, work-at-home professionals, and people with special needs. Boston possesses a good foundation for such a housing system, with a diversity of housing types in neighborhoods across the city and an eclectic mix of housing units – old and new, traditional and modern, large and small. Some 75 percent of employers in a national survey reported that housing is "important" or "very important" to deciding whether to move to an area. To respond to the growing pressures of Boston's tight housing market, the city needs to expand its aggressive strategy to build, rehabilitate, and maintain housing in all of Boston's neighborhoods. In addition, the City should make special efforts to connect housing to a broad range of services and support structures. Housing should be located close to transit services, social services, retail districts, schools, and cultural attractions; housing should be considered an integral part of the city's many urban villages, not just an isolated good.

Vision

Over the next generation, Boston will build on its impressive stock of housing to create a balanced supply of all kinds of housing in all neighborhoods. This effort will center on two major priorities – development of vacant lots and rehabilitation of existing units – with strategic plans developed on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis. By strategically leveraging public and private monies, the City will encourage the development of thousands of units of new housing and the rehabilitation of thousands more. These units should be designed to fit into the urban character of the city, with connections to public transit, commercial districts, schools, parks and gardens, and cultural and historic resources. To protect communities from the booms and busts of the economy, the City should encourage building housing units that require extended periods of affordability. The City should continue to encourage middle-class home ownership to foster greater stability in the neighborhood housing markets. Over the long term, Boston's housing policy would be part of a metropolitan housing strategy, where the housing needs of all communities are met with a series of incentives to provide diverse housing throughout Greater Boston. *[see SIDE goals of a housing policy]*

Assets and opportunities

Boston has always been **one of the nation's most livable cities** because of the variety of housing types that met the needs of residents of all backgrounds and financial circumstances. The city's housing stock varies according to a series of concentric rings. The innermost ring – the North End, Beacon Hill, and Back Bay and the Fenway – contains almost exclusively apartment and condominium buildings. The next ring – which includes the South End, South Boston, and Charlestown – is dominated by multifamily dwellings but also includes a more

visible scattering of single-family homes. Another ring – characterized by a mix of detached single-, two- and three-family houses – exists in communities like East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, and parts of Dorchester. The final ring includes all of these types but is dominated by single-family dwellings as well.

Boston's growing **neighborhood diversity** creates a more vibrant mix of homebuyers than the city has ever seen. In the past generation, Boston has transformed itself from a working-class city of white ethnic neighborhoods into a growing melting pot of minorities and immigrants from all over the world. New populations have revitalized communities all over the City, including East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Allston/Brighton, Roslindale, Mattapan, and Dorchester. In recent years, Hispanics have been greater participants in the buyer market. Some 153 Hispanic homebuyers took advantage of the City's assistance program in fiscal year 1998, more than twice as many as two years before did. The major challenge for populations at the low end of the income ladder is simple affordability. The elderly and the growing number of householders who work at home pose growing challenges for policymakers.

Boston's **diverse housing stock**, while one of the oldest in the nation, provides a strong foundation for housing and community development. All over the city can be found apartment buildings, two- and three-deckers, single-family homes, and special facilities such as elderly housing, "halfway houses," and other housing with support services. *[see SIDE housing breakdown]*

In looking forward to a citywide housing plan, one of the greatest resources is a wealth of **vacant parcels** available for development. Citywide, about 2,700 vacant parcels are available for housing and other development. Not all of these parcels are appropriate for housing development since many of the parcels are contaminated, have poor access, are located near dangerous traffic, or located in industrial or business zones, but many are. In order to develop vacant parcels, the City needs an analysis of which sites are most appropriate for what kinds of development and what kind of financing is necessary to facilitate that development. *[see MAP vacant parcels citywide]*

Institutionally, Boston's **community development corporations** (CDC's), working with a number of financial intermediaries, have become national leaders in creative financing of housing, community participation in development, and linking housing construction and rehabilitation with business and community development. City efforts to increase the stock of affordable housing are centered on subsidies for low-income developments. In Fiscal Year 1998, the City spent $28.36 million, which contributed to the completion of 452 units, as well as 1,280 units under construction, and 1,780 units in the planning stages. DND subsidies ranged from $7,500 for one unit in Dorchester to $2 million for 183 units in Lowell Square/West End Place. In total, the City contributed $8.84 million toward the completion of 452 units of housing, an average of $19,666 per unit. The City contributed $12.01 million toward the partial construction of 1,280 units, an average of $9,389 per unit. *[see SIDE CDCs] [see MAP of CDC locations]*

Linkage money also provides funds for housing development. Since 1986, the Boston Neighborhood Housing Trust has expended $47.5 million to contribute to the development of 4,828 housing units in 68 housing developments across the city. In the next generation, according to an analysis by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau, the amount of linkage funds for housing could reach $123 million. Because the money is remitted to the Trust over periods of seven years for downtown projects and 12 years for neighborhood projects, managing that money is critical to the program's success. After conducting analyses of past Trust expenditures and current housing needs, future funds will be targeted to the areas of the city with the most

urgent needs for housing. Chapter 371, the state law authorizing the Trust's operations, requires that the Mayor and the City Council approve all linkage funds. If combined with funds from federal, state, and nonprofit sources, such a concentration of funds could provide a major impetus toward fair housing in Boston.

In recent years, business and real estate developers have **rediscovered the potential of the city**. Empty-nesters have returned to neighborhoods all over Boston in search of the vitality of urban life. Businesses have also discovered the "competitive advantage" of the city. A decade ago, grocery stores and other retailers and service providers were leaving the city for the more affluent suburbs. But businesses have discovered that even in some of the city's poorer neighborhoods, the spending power exceeds those of many affluent suburbs because of the greater density of urban communities. Retailers' return to the city creates new opportunities for housing as well as commercial development. The challenge is to provide a housing stock that meets the needs of people at all levels of the ladder and to avoid the displacement and price inflation that accompanies the entry of newcomers into a community.

Barriers and challenges

Boston faces a serious **inadequacy of supply** for poor and working class people. In its consolidated plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Neighborhood Development reported that Boston has demonstrated needs for 5,750 additional rental units for elderly households of 1 or 2 people, 9,225 rental units for 2- to 4-person households, 2,320 households with 5 or more people, and 15,450 rental units for other households. In addition, much of Boston's housing stock is old and in need of maintenance and rehabilitation. The units now available have seen skyrocketing rental costs; only in Roxbury is the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment below $800 per month.

A basic reality of housing is that the **costs of construction and rehabilitation** exceed the ability of many residents to pay. In today's economy, to produce a modest two-bedroom unit with about 1,000 square feet costs about $170,000. Major rehabilitation of a unit of the same size costs about $135,000. These facts alone suggest the importance of maintaining the quality of existing units and the need to leverage money from government and nonprofit corporations to build affordable new units. They also suggest the importance of creating an economic policy that provides good jobs at good wages for people of all ages and income levels.

Apart from construction and rehabilitation costs, Boston's hot real-estate market has fueled **dramatic increases in sale prices and rents** in virtually all neighborhoods of the City. Jamaica Plain typifies the price spiral. Between 1994 and 1997, the price of one-family homes increased 40 percent, two-family homes 60 percent, and three-family homes 72 percent, according to a 1998 study by the HOME Coalition. Urban Edge, a community development corporation that builds subsidized homes, has a waiting list of 2,000 families for its units.

Inadequate income poses the greatest barrier to housing access and affordability. According to a study by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, the wages needed to pay for housing and other necessities of life are greater than many families in Boston earn. To provide a lifestyle that is "not luxurious or even comfortable," a single person working full-time must earn at least $15,642 annually to afford housing without any government assistance. The addition of one preschool-aged child to the household more than doubles the wages needed to pay for housing and other expenses to $31,782. Addition of a second child raises the needed wages still more to $38,563. The high cost of housing often forced families to cut back on other necessities

like food, clothing, heat, or materials for school. The concept of "shelter poverty" measures the number of people whose housing costs come at the expense of other basic needs. Statewide, more than half of all minority renters – 52 percent of blacks, 54 percent of Asian-Americans, and 71 percent of Latinos – were "shelter poor." The public and policymakers need to be educated about the need for "deep subsidies" to assure access to housing for people of all income levels.

Changes in household composition have dramatically changed the character of housing as a commodity. With changes in family formation patterns – with more single adults and smaller families for couples – Boston's household sizes have declined dramatically in recent years. With those changes, the design and functioning of the household – and its place in the community – changes as well. The average size of the household in Boston declined from 3.6 to 2.3 between 1950 and 1990. During the same period, the percentage of single-person households increased from 7.2 to 25.8. The number of "non-traditional" families has been on the rise as well. The number of female-headed single-parent households in Massachusetts increased from 3.4 million to 12.8 million from 1940 to 1997. The impact of household change on housing stock is significant. First, it changes the overall need for housing units. Whereas 801,000 people were housed in 221,000 units in 1950, 574,283 people were housed in 250,863 units in 1990; in short, *225,000 fewer people required almost 25,000 additional units.* Second, the design of the units is affected. Inappropriate subdivision of buildings to accommodate the growing demand for housing units can undermine the integrity and maintenance programs of the structures. Third, changes in household size also affects how the house fits in with the larger community. With more two-earner families and fewer extended families, households lend less of a presence to the everyday life of the neighborhood. These developments require a stronger public realm –in terms of physical amenities like parks and community centers, as well as family and social services like day care and after-school arts and sports programming. Finally, with more people working at home and using homes for other purpose, it is important to develop structures that can accommodate a wide range of activities. Zoning should be flexible enough to allow for a wide range of housing types, especially in areas zoned for two- and three-family homes and apartments.

Booms and busts in the economic cycle create swings in the value of housing that hurts people in both good times and bad. When the economy is strong, housing costs are bid up by high-income workers – and higher housing costs ripple to every part of the market. When the economy is weak, housing costs fall but not always to the benefit of ordinary Bostonians. With high unemployment and stagnant wages, people often experience difficulty meeting the mortgage payments on their homes while others have a difficult time meeting rent payments. Many landlords cut back on basic maintenance as housing costs fall, leading to longterm damage to the housing stock. Franklin Raines, the chief executive officer of Fannie Mae, said about Boston: "This is a unique market with very low unemployment and high-income people – particularly young high-income people – who are able to bid up housing prices. Affordability is becoming a big problem. … When there is a recession – and there will be one – we want to be prepared."

The overall strength of Boston's economy creates new opportunities for housing development, but also puts greater and greater **pressure on housing prices** in neighborhoods like parts of Charlestown, the North End, Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and the South End. The price inflation in these neighborhoods drives out middle-class residents and undermines the diversity of retail and other economic activity as well. The housing inflation in the City core also exerts a ripple effect throughout the rest of the City. As people are priced out of their homes in the Back

Bay and South End, for example, they seek out homes in less expensive neighborhoods such as Jamaica Plain and South Boston. The middle-belt communities that once provided affordable housing for families and young people, in turn, feel a price squeeze and move out to the outer belt of the City, putting pressure there as well.

The expiration of mandates for developers and landlords to provide below-market housing – the so-called **"expiring use" properties** – poses major problems for the City. Under the Section 236 program, the federal government offered private developers below-market interest rates for loans for housing developments that provided units for low- and moderate-income families and senior citizens for a contractually defined period of time. When the low-income use restrictions expire, the developers have the right to pay the mortgage and rent those units at market rates. Hundreds of Boston families face displacement by expiring use under the Section 236 program. Many contracts provide low-income housing under Section 8 also have expired, exposing another group of renters to skyrocketing rents. The number of Section 8 contracts expiring placed the following number of units in jeopardy of being lost to market-rate rents: in Massachusetts: 2,323 in 1999, 485 in 2000, 763 in 2001, and 279 in 2002 – for a total of 3,850 in four years. All over Greater Boston, housing experts report that families have been displaced, forced to leave their neighborhoods, or forced to "double up" with family and friends.

Another problem is the effective congressional **cutbacks of Section 8** and other subsidies. Under contractual agreements with building owners, Section 8 has subsidized rents for people at or near the poverty line since 1974. In 1998, Congress rescinded $2 billion in funds already authorized for the program. Congress also has restricted the ability of new families to get Section 8 certificates when other families leave the program. When one family leaves the program due to its ability to earn a higher income or for any other reason, another family cannot take that family's "place" in the program for three months. In Massachusetts, there are 62,000 units of housing paid with Section 8 vouchers.

Many financial institutions exert subtle **pressure against creative approaches** to housing that are vital to urban revitalization. Because of the risks inherent in the housing business for lenders, insurance companies, builders, and communities, the housing industry tends to avoid housing strategies that are critical to the longterm vitality of cities. Building or renovating housing in mixed-use districts, once a vital part of community life, is treated skeptically by many parts of the financial and housing industries. Boston's real estate industry has shown little interest in cooperative housing, which dampens speculative pressures in some large cities. Builders increasingly develop suburban-style houses with large setbacks and parking requirements because those styles dominate the industry in dispersed metropolitan areas. The danger is that the tightly knit urban style of development will fade, further undermining public transit and other amenities associated with city living.

Building on vacant land is complicated by a number of factors. Because many landowners live far from the city and pay minimal taxes because of low property assessments, there often is little incentive for turnover or development of their parcels. The built environments of neighborhoods like Dorchester and Roxbury – with well-built homes and businesses adjacent to vacant lots and car-oriented businesses – create patchy environments for development. The lack of community definition or anchors makes new investments more risky than more connected communities. Contamination of vacant parcels is another disincentive for development

Lack of maintenance endangers existing stock. An aging housing stock puts extreme maintenance pressures on owners of multi-dwelling structures, and lesser pressures on apartment owners and managers and single-family homeowners. People who can afford to make a down

payment and meet monthly mortgage obligations might not be capable of responding to structural deficiencies in structures ranging from broken windows to leaky roofs to old furnaces, wiring, and plumbing.

Like other cities, Boston faces an ongoing crisis with **vulnerable populations** like the homeless, people with physical or mental illness, people with substance abuse problems, and the elderly. In all of these cases, housing is just one of many dimensions of the problem. Shelter must be supplemented with a wide range of support services, such as health care, job training, day care, and transportation. With an aging population, creating housing options for seniors will be a greater priority. Nearly half of all elderly households are eligible for some kind of public assistance, more in cities like Boston. As people age, they need more health care and other social services. There is also a growing awareness of the desirability of integrating elders into communities with families and younger couples; isolation from the diversity of the community robs both elders and the rest of the population of important support structures. Other populations also face significant housing challenges. The Emergency Shelter Commission found in December 1998 that 5,272 individuals were homeless in Boston. Examining these data, the General Accounting Office found that 44 percent of this population lived in adult shelters, 23 percent in family shelters, 4 percent on the street, and the remainder in traditional housing programs and institutions. All tolled, homeless families in Massachusetts numbered about 10,900 in 1997, an increase of 118 percent since 1990. Many shelters provide places to sleep during the crisis months of extreme weather, but the homeless problem requires attention to a wide range of other problems like family breakdown, job readiness, and substance abuse. The mentally ill also suffer from inadequate housing and support services; the state Department of Mental Health reports a waiting list of more than 3,000 persons seeking placement in special residences. People with AIDS pose another grave problem. Despite the waning of the crisis atmosphere, the City and Commonwealth face the problem of a growing population of people with AIDS seeking hospice and other residential care.

With an annual college and university **student population** of 80,000, about 15 percent of the City's overall population, Boston's neighborhoods face enormous pressure on rents and sale prices. According to a study commissioned by the City of Boston, some 57,000 students live in conventional housing, with 20,000 to 25,000 students living in one four-square-mile area of Allston-Brighton. Students often fit four or more people into apartments designed for one or two residents. Students who are willing to spend $500 a month each push the price of a two-bedroom apartment to $2,000 a month and beyond, artificially inflating the rents and purchase prices of units in the neighborhoods. The Boston Redevelopment Authority encourages universities to build on-campus student housing to reduce the pressure on local housing markets, but even then dormitories can create pressures on communities by "blowing out" their neighborhood character.

Development pressures come from universities, medical centers, and other major institutions. The 32 colleges and universities, 26 inpatient hospitals, and dozens of other community service institutions feed a growing demand for scarce development space in the City's neighborhoods. The higher value-generating capacity of the institutions overwhelms neighborhood housing markets, particularly in conveniently located neighborhoods like Back Bay, Fenway/Kenmore, Mission Hill, Lower Roxbury, and Allston/Brighton. Expansion plans for universities and medical institutions represent a double-edged sword for neighborhoods. On the one hand, these plans offer vast new employment and development opportunities for the larger community; on the other hand, expansion inevitably produces greater traffic congestion and often causes gentrification that displaces longtime residents. The Boston Redevelopment

Authority requires major institutions to develop master plans whenever they plan to expand their real estate significantly. These master plans should take into account not only the direct impacts of institutional development, but also the indirect and longterm impacts.

Many neighborhoods in Boston resist the development of new or rehabilitated housing and services. This NIMBY problem – "Not In My Back Yard" – makes it difficult to provide fair access to housing for people of all income levels around the city. Neighborhoods put up especially stiff resistance to housing and related services for poor people, homeless, and people with special problems such as substance addition and mental illness. For Boston's housing market to serve all people, neighborhoods across the city need to provide a fair share of housing of all types. Shelter for homeless persons is a case in point. The Pine Street Inn in Chinatown serves 1,100 people a day, with 313 beds for emergency shelter and 364 beds for transitional housing for limited periods. Ideally, the programs of the Pine Street Inn and other homeless programs would operate on a small scale in every neighborhood, serving the residents of the community where they have their greatest attachments.

Boston shoulders a **disproportionate burden in the provision of affordable housing regionally**. The city is one of only 10 communities – in a metropolitan area of 117 jurisdictions – that provides affordable housing for at least 10 percent of its population. Boston needs to challenge its neighboring cities and towns to provide more affordable housing in addition to redoubling its own efforts. According to a 1998 survey by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, 48,579 – or about 19.43 percent – of the city's total units are subsidized. Boston has 10.5 percent of the state's total year-round housing units but 23.9 percent of the state's subsidized units. (Cities with less than 10 percent of the housing stock subsidized are subject to Chapter 774, which allows the state to override local zoning ordinances to promote more subsidized units.)

Actions

Challenges for federal and state agencies include . . .

- **Call on the federal and state governments to commit to the creation of new housing and protect populations that need assistance.** The immediate cause of the recent crisis in housing affordability is cutbacks in federal and state housing programs and the expiration of statutory and regulatory rules that require provision of affordable housing. In addition to negotiating with landlords to maintain reasonable rents, the City should create a contingency fund for all programs to protect against the interruption of federal and state support. Such a "rainy day" fund would give the City the resources it needs to care for the people who get stuck in the middle of a real-estate market that is characterized by extreme price inflation – and by higher and higher costs of entry for first-time buyers.

Drastic reductions of Federal aid for housing and changes in both Federal and state regulations on matters ranging from rent control to tax credits and other development subsidies create a turbulent environment for housing. Boston's ability to provide new housing opportunities depends on developing a united effort with city officials from all over the country to press for more equitable tax and regulatory policies, housing subsidies, and community development programs. The City of Boston budgets $9 million a year for low-income housing development.

- **Ensure that housing is available for vulnerable populations**. With the aging of the population comes a need for a range of housing and housing services for the elderly. For many seniors and other longtime owners of property, the increased valuation of homes brings increases

in property taxes that make it difficult to make ends meet on a day to day basis. Residents who are "house rich and cash poor" face the dilemma of selling their properties and leaving the city. The City now allows seniors 65 years and older to postpone making property tax payments until they sell their homes. By developing programs that allow seniors to live off the expected resale value of their property, the Commonwealth and City could ease those everyday financial burdens. State and local governments might also develop incentives for seniors to move from housing that is too large into structures that provide comfortable living spaces and support services. At the same time, seniors should receive government protection from unscrupulous real-estate businesses that seek to acquire their property without adequate compensation and support.

Challenges for the city include . . .

- **Create a permanent community housing commission to assess housing needs and resources in all neighborhoods**: This group, which would hold public meetings in all neighborhoods over the course of the year, would identify the specific needs and opportunities in all of Boston's neighborhoods. Members would include representatives of the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Reporting to the Mayor's housing advisor, with adequate support staff directed by the advisor, the commission would assess the adequacy of different rungs in the housing ladder and identify specific ways to fix the broken rungs in each neighborhood. The commission would identify strategies for improving production of housing for the disadvantaged in all neighborhoods and provide for greater levels of density when such density could enhance the "urban village" character of the neighborhoods. The commission should work with the community to identify parcels that offer new opportunities for housing and community development. When necessary, the commission should initiate a formal process of community mediation similar to the successful consensus-building efforts in Hartford and Greater Bridgeport in Connecticut. Through this process, Boston can move beyond the "just build more" approach in favor of a careful identification of specific housing needs in all neighborhoods of the city.
- **Develop housing development goals for each community of Boston***:* Each neighborhood in Boston has its own unique strengths and shortcomings in housing. When brought together into a citywide plan, neighborhood housing initiatives should begin to address all of the city's overall housing issues. The notion of a "ladder of opportunity" – which provides different kinds of housing for different stages in people's life-cycles – provides a strong framework for a housing policy not only for traditional households but also for new household types, such as the single-room occupancy developments, group homes, multigenerational housing, cooperative housing, co-housing, and so on. The needs of each neighborhood should be quantified on a regular basis to provide strong goals and strategies for proving housing opportunities for all Bostonians. Examine the patterns of buying among all demographic groups in Boston, especially immigrants whose investments in housing parallels groups of 50 years ago. *[see SIDE importance of housing design]*
- **Decrease the impact of speculation.** Because housing is fundamentally a finite commodity – unlike clothing, for example, we cannot easily "make more" when we face a shortage – a strong housing policy requires efforts to remove part of the housing stock from speculative development. Boston has the lowest percentage of cooperative units among large cities in the U.S. – less than 1 percent of the city's total housing stock – which leaves the market open to greater speculative swings than other cities. The coops that exist in Boston have long waiting lists, indicating their attractiveness to people interested in stable rents and less concerned

about resale value. The prudent development of cooperative housing – with several hundred units of low-equity units annually – over time would protect thousands of residents from unreasonable rent increases without disturbing the legitimate investments of others. In addition to coops, the city should encourage the construction of rental properties with built-in protections against excessive increases in rents. *[see SIDE creative housing]*

- **Develop a strong and consistent policy of inclusionary zoning throughout the city.** Boston's current building boom provides an unparalleled opportunity to build housing for people of all income levels in all neighborhoods of the city. The requirement that developers set aside part of each development for homes that would sell or rent at relatively reasonable rates is common in California and on the books in New Jersey and Maryland. An inclusionary zoning program in Montgomery County, Maryland, requires a set-aside of 20 percent for affordable units in new housing construction. In addition, many cities offer zoning bonuses to builders who develop extra units at affordable rates. Boston could benefit from inclusionary zoning as well, especially in neighborhoods where longtime residents are being prices out by more affluent young professionals and families.
- **Invest in the city's public realm.** The old adage about what gives houses and other properties value – "location, location, location" – is critical to the development of new housing and the rehabilitation of existing units. Good location adds value to housing by providing attractive surroundings, proximity to goods and services, accessibility to parks and public facilities, and the convenience of transportation systems. Strategic investments in the public realm such as parks and trees, streets and transit stations, schools and libraries can provide incentive for developers and current owners to invest more in a neighborhood. The City's housing policy should include targeted investments in the public realm where the potential for developing and rehabbing housing is greatest.

Provide support for tenants and other groups that want to protect the affordability of their homes: When properties become available for housing development, the City should engage neighborhood residents in processes that restrict the speculative character of that housing. Public partnerships with tenant groups can assure the longterm affordability of units. At the Methunion Manor in the South End, for example, tenants and public agencies agreed to funding and management programs that gave tenants significant control and the resources needed to keep the units affordable. Working through the demonstration-disposition ("demo-dispo") process, residents of Roxbury, the South End, Dorchester, and Mattapan have assured that 2,100 units of housing remain affordable for decades to come and are managed to meet their needs. The demo-dispo model developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development could be expanded and applied to guide the rehabilitation and development of housing throughout the city.

- **Provide support for maintenance of existing structures.** Because Boston's housing stock is among the oldest in the United States, maintenance is a critical factor in providing affordable places to live. The City should develop an aggressive process to identify and assess troubled structures, and to provide incentives for long-term maintenance. The problem extends to all kinds of housing, but especially multi-family dwellings. Many parttime landlords – people who own more than one unit but earn their living by other means – struggle when major maintenance problems occur because they do not factor many costs into the everyday operations of their properties. By developing aggressive programs to fix up existing structures, the city can save tens of thousands of structures – and get a "bigger bang for the buck" in public and private investments. *[see SIDE housing maintenance]*

Challenges for the institutions include . . .

- **Develop a comprehensive commitments to build to student housing.** Another approach to dampen housing costs – and to strengthen the overall character of communities – is the development of a comprehensive approach to housing students. The City should develop action plans with universities to assure that as many students are housed on campus as possible. Comprehensive institutional planning is needed in all neighborhoods, with links to improvements in public transportation, parking restrictions, balanced and appropriate scales of development, and community resources that integrate institutions into the larger community. The BRA now requires all universities and major institutions to submit master plans along with any significant development projects. Already, several institutions have made commitments to increase the number of students required to live on campus. Boston University is building 820 rooms at the Armory site on Commonwealth Avenue. Northeastern University is building a 760-room West Campus dormitory and will house another 610 students at its Davenport Commons facility. Suffolk University has committed to building dorms for 1,000 additional students. Boston College has committed to housing 75 percent of its undergraduate students on campus, but has no plans to accommodate its 10,000 graduate students.

- **Encourage financial institutions to provide a broader range of tools for construction and rehabilitation of housing.** Major financial institutions – such as Fannie Mae, the Federal Home Loan Bank, banks, savings and loan institutions, insurance companies, the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency – have for the past generation favored suburban-style development over urban-style development. These institutions provide numerous products and programs to house middle-class families in single-family homes. But they have been less eager to develop financial tools to build and rehabilitate urban-style housing – two- and three-family houses, apartment buildings, housing with limited parking and land, housing located near and inside

business districts, and housing located close to transit stations. If Boston and other cities are to provide housing that meets the needs their diverse populations, financial institutions need to provide programs that provide the money for urban-style housing. Perhaps working with housing officials from other cities in Massachusetts and New England, Boston should convene a summit of financial institutions to explore what specific improvements in lending programs can build the kinds of housing that is appropriate to urban settings. The City should seek a longterm commitment from these institutions to provide creative new funding mechanisms for urban-style housing.

SUPPORTING INITIATIVE: COMMUNITY GATEWAYS AND MARKERS

Thirteen independent towns and cities surround the City of Boston. Within Boston, numerous neighborhood crossroads provide access to critical citywide and regional attractions. Too often, these "signature" spaces are not marked adequately. When motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians enter Boston from Milton at Mattapan Square or from Brookline at Route 9 – just to take two examples – they should be greeted with a gateway that dramatizes the transition. Entering the city is often unremarkable and sometimes even dispiriting. Exciting gateways should be established all over Boston – not only at the city's entrances from neighboring cities and towns, but also at major destinations and neighborhood squares and centers. Logan Airport, Franklin Park, Roslindale Square, and the Seaport District are just a handful of places where an elegant gateway should orient people and at the same time highlight the importance of special places.

Vision

Boston should establish a system of gateways at all of its major crossroads – both entryways into the city and access points to major places inside the city. These gateways must be carefully conceptualized and designed to mark the transition from one space to another. Special gates, posts, banners, signs, landscaping, and monuments are just some of the markers that would be appropriate to orient people as they move from one place to another.

Assets and opportunities

Residents from several neighborhoods expressed the **desire to celebrate the gateways** to their neighborhoods or to attractions in their communities. Entrances are critical to the definition of a neighborhood – and residents are eager to contribute their time and ideas to designing entryways that express the values and identity of the community. Already, communities all over the city have improved some of their signature spaces through the Boston Main Streets, Boston Boulevards Initiative, and other community-based planning initiatives. Many communities have gathered funds on their own to create attractive entryways, landscaping, clocks, and other markers. This enthusiasm for developing physical community markers provides a good foundation for a citywide gateways program. *[see MAP of gateways]*

Residents and local merchants possess the **local knowledge** needed to develop the most appropriate gateways. Community involvement is essential to develop appropriate designs for gateways. In some communities, elegant signs might be enough to orient the area's users and strengthen local identity. In other communities, landscaping might be more appropriate. In still others, existing relics from previous community-buildings efforts – such as the stone columns at Westland Avenue in the Fenway – could be the basis of community markers. Gateways and markers might not be appropriate for all entryways and centers. Community consensus on the need for such devices, as well as their design, is essential to the success of this initiative.

In recent years, a number of communities have demonstrated the understanding that **public realm improvements can produce dramatic improvements** for businesses and institutions as well as residents. The Boston Main Streets program has engaged residents and merchants in 16 districts to improve the overall appearance and identity of business centers around the city. Plans to enhance Huntington Avenue's streetscape and rename it the Avenue of the Arts also provide a

model of how improvements in the public realm can improve the overall wellbeing of institutions.

People throughout the city recognize **two distinct kinds of gateways**. Entryways into the city include Mattapan Square (from Milton); Morrissey Boulevard in Dorchester (from Quincy); the Boston Harbor waterfront (from various water transit services); Logan Airport in East Boston (from points all over the nation and world); Rutherford Avenue in Charlestown (from Somerville and Everett); the Longfellow, Harvard, and Boston University bridges (from Cambridge); Beacon Street in Brighton (from Newton and Brookline), the South Huntington/Huntington Avenue intersection (from Brookline), and the VFW Parkway in West Roxbury (from Dedham). Neighborhood gateways could include places ranging from major business districts like Allston Village and Dudley Square in Roxbury to major destinations like the Franklin Park Zoo and Fenway Park.

The City of Boston in 1999 established a new program to highlight community identity called **Neighborhood Improvements through Capital Expenditures** (NICE). This effort offers funding for any project that is not part of a larger capital plan and costs less than $50,000. Besides gateways, projects eligible for NICE money include kiosks, bulletin boards, and other physical improvements that improve the overall character of the community crossroads.

Barriers and challenges

The fundamental barrier to the development of a coherent system of gateways is the **lack of coordination**. The Mayor's NICE program might offer the basis of such a coordinating system. But that program would need to be connected with more ambitious capital investment programs.

Another potential problem is the **lack of coordination of institutional approaches** to expressing a city identity. Museums, universities, hospitals, and other major attractions understandably desire to emphasize their own identity. But if they are to benefit from a strong civic identity, they need to be related to the larger city context. Before any citywide gateway initiative can be developed, the City needs to call together representatives of a wide range of agencies from all levels of government, private and nonprofit organizations, and community groups to establish a framework for improving the gateways and information systems of the city.

Cost is a final barrier to a citywide system of gateways and markers. Gateways could cost as little as $1,000 to $5,000 and as much as $100,000 or more. Over time, the gateway project could cost several million dollars. The cost of construction is only part of the necessary investment. Good design and community process are essential to insure that the gateway is appropriate in scale, appearance, and placement.

Actions

The challenges for the city include . . .

- **Initiate a citywide gateways program.** Building on the Mayor's NICE initiative, create a citywide effort to identify places in the city where gateways and markers would enhance the neighborhoods and orient people passing by the area. Identify two types of projects: gateways at the city's different entryways and markers at critical crossroads and destinations. Coordinate a matching program with community entities that can demonstrate community consensus and design excellence for projects.

- **Develop landscaping and urban design programs.** Gateways should be understood to include more than signs and public art near the edges of a community. Gateways should also be understood as the larger environment that provides a sense of transition and excitement as someone moves from one place to another. In many cases, the only appropriate gateway is improvement of streetscape and urban design. Kneeland Street, the gateway from Interstate 93 and South Boston to Downtown, is a case in point.
- **Coordinate organizations undertaking public and private markers programs.** Call together representatives of government agencies, private developers, and universities and other major institutions to develop ground rules for developing gateways all over the city. Provide incentives where necessary to foster some semblance of consistency in the approaches toward gateway design. Work with consultants to create a citywide plan that identifies and marks the most significant gateway spaces in the city.

The challenges for the community include . . .

- **Identify locations and designs for gateways.** As part of the Boston 400 community process, residents have already identified places where they would like gateways to be located to welcome visitors to their communities. The City's NICE program – Neighborhood Improvements through Capital Expenditures – should invite the neighborhoods to make formal applications to build gateways at these places. After reviewing the Boston 400 gateway maps, the City should begin a community-centered process of design and construction.

The challenges for the institutions include . . .

- **Working with the city, insure that institutions are connected to the city's wayfinding systems.** The City's major institutions – universities, hospitals, museums, places of worship, and sports franchises – have a direct interest in orienting visitors to their neighborhood. The institutions also have a responsibility to make sure that their gateways and wayfinding systems complement the City's systems. Institutions should demonstrate how their systems enhance the City's systems before they implement them.

Chapter 2 SIDEBARS

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Community Development Corporations

In cities across the nation, community development corporations have played a growing role in the production and rehabilitation of housing. Boston is one of the most vibrant cities for CDC-driven development. All told, Boston has 24 CDC's working to build housing in 12 neighborhoods.

A CDC is a nonprofit development and management company. The primary goal of CDC's is to produce housing and commercial developments the meet the needs of the community. The typical CDC project requires cobbling together a variety of government programs – low interest rates, building subsidies, program grants, rent allowances – to provide financing for projects that might not otherwise be possible. CDC's also work with banks that are required to invest in their service areas under the federal Community Reinvestment Act of 1978. In return for public and private assistance, the CDC agrees to provide the housing units below market cost to low- and moderate-income dwellers.

While in the 1970s CDC's focused almost exclusively on housing, CDC's today work equally on housing and economic development projects. A greater understanding of the importance of housing support services – and of the need for community development – has brought CDC's into commercial development. One prominent example is the redevelopment of the Haffenreffer Brewery in Jamaica Plain for some 23 small businesses that provide 150 jobs.

CDC's must work closely with both government agencies and community groups. CDC projects vary in their scale from one or two units to major neighborhood planning and development strategies. Often, CDC efforts get expanded to larger planning initiatives. Efforts by the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH) led to a comprehensive planning strategy in East Boston by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1998 and 1999. A proposal by Urban Edge spurred another BRA planning effort in 1999 in Jackson Square, which lies on the border of Jamaica Plain and Roxbury.

One problem with CDC developments is their high "soft costs" – the technical and administrative expenses associated with putting together complex deals involving many parties and using many financing instruments. Soft costs often accound for 20 percent of total development costs.

Because of their need to garner broad community support, CDC projects sometimes take longer than private projects. Most CDC's conduct open community processes to consider a range of possibilities for development of vacant or underutilized parcels. CDC's must address a range of conflicting community goals before adopting projects.

CDC's increasingly reflect the demographic character of their communities. The Lena Park CDC, founded in 1969, has undertaken dozens of projects to transform its area of Dorchester.

Many CDC projects go beyond housing and commercial development to include improvements in the public realm. Parks and playgrounds, community centers, health facilities, day care, targeted recreation and education programs, and employment and training programs.

Because of their impact on the community and use of vacant parcels, CDC projects also require coordination with government agencies such as the city's BRA, Department of Neighborhood Development, and Parks Department, as well as the state's Metropolitan District Commission and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Below are the names and service areas of Boston's community development corporations:

- ✓ Allston Brighton CDC, Allston/Brighton.
- ✓ Asian CDC, Chinatown.
- ✓ Back of the Hill CDC, Mission Hill.
- ✓ Codman Square NDC, Dorchester.
- ✓ Dorchester Bay EDC, Dorchester.
- ✓ East Boston CDC, East Boston.
- ✓ Fenway CDC, Fenway.
- ✓ Fields Corner CDC, Dorchester.
- ✓ Grove Hall NDC, Roxbury.
- ✓ Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion (IBA), South End.
- ✓ Jamaica Plain NDC, Jamaica Pain.
- ✓ Lena Park CDC, Dorchester.
- ✓ Madison Park CDC, Roxbury.
- ✓ Mattapan CDC, Mattapan.
- ✓ Mission Hill NHS, Mission Hill.
- ✓ New Vision CDC, Dorchester.
- ✓ Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), East Boston.
- ✓ Nuestra Comunidad, Roxbury.
- ✓ Old West End Housing Corporation, West End.
- ✓ South Boston NDC, South Boston.
- ✓ Tent City Corporation, South End.
- ✓ United South End Lower Roxbury Corporation, South End.
- ✓ Urban Edge Housing Corporation, Roxbury.
- ✓ VIET-AID, Dorchester.

Charm bracelets

Building a charm bracelet requires two sets of tasks. First, residents need to identify all of the places in a community that might have some interest to residents and visitors. Second, a variety of physical enhancements need to be adopted to connect these places into a seamless system.

Ultimately, the goal is to create enough "legibility" to the many community attractions so that people can see at least one or two charms wherever they are. The charm bracelet should provide a well-defined path with intermediate goals or attractions along the way. Here are some of the physical strategies to create a charm bracelet.

Size. Keeping parks a manageable size is one of the secrets of good parks and civic spaces. Most good civic spaces are enclosed inside an urban "wall." The ratio of open space to the height of the surrounding buildings should be around 4 to 1, creating an outdoor room rather than the wide open feeling one gets in a park.

Streets and sidewalks. The streets and sidewalks that connect the pieces of the charm bracelet should create a continuous strand to hold the pieces of the bracelet together. The streets should carry a maximum of four lanes of traffic (two each way), and the sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate people walking each way. Short blocks are better than long blocks because they create regular pauses along the route. They also offer many crossroads where people can encounter each other. Sidewalks should contain adventures along the way – outdoor cafes, beautiful art, unusual storefronts. Most of all, the streets and sidewalks should offer a seamless path for people to walk from charm to charm.

Pedestrian paths and stairs. Some charm bracelets might include some off-road paths and stairs that draw people into parks, gardens, and special places to sit or meet someone. These paths should be well-maintained so that they are visible from nearby streets and sidewalks. Hardscape is important to provide clear routes for people to walk and to minimize maintenance costs.

Signage and interpretive materials. All of the attractions along the charm bracelet should be marked with a simple, elegant sign that describes the place. These signs should be visible from sidewalks. They should have a consistent design and color. At key points along the path – parks, major crossroads and gateways, simple maps showing the many different attractions should be available. The maps that offer guidance at the Arnold Arboretum provide good models to follow.

Façade improvements. Buildings should be interesting enough to keep the attention of the pedestrian. Most interesting buildings show some kind of interesting details. If the building does not contain any special architectural details, it should at least offer a glimpse of interesting things and activities inside. The doors and windows should be welcoming to all passersby. The more continuous and interesting the "street wall," the greater the connectivity between charms.

Landscaping. The edges of parks, libraries, schools, and other buildings play a critical role in attracting people's attention. People need to be able to see into the attractions of the charm bracelet.

Joint "campus" enhancements. Many places in the neighborhood are clustered together but do not have access to each other's space. To bring these places together, institutions need to collaborate on landscaping and other design that makes connections between places.

Places to sit and meet. Wherever you go along the charm bracelet, there should be places to sit. Transit stops, libraries and schools, parks, business districts – all need to provide a place for pedestrians to refresh or regroup.

Protection from the elements. A good charm bracelet is comfortable and accessible year round, whatever the weather. Bus stops need shelters. Sidewalks should offer some cover from the rain. Canopies, shelters, and provide places to avoid rain or get a respite from the heat. Trees can also proivide a canopy that protects people from wind, sun, and rain.

Public art. Public art does more than enrich the aesthetic quality of the area. It also offer landmarks and meeting places. Placement requires careful planning. All public art should stand on its own, but also help to define its street, plaza, or park. Public art should not block people's paths, but provide an opportunity to step aside for a moment. Parks should always have a central focus or two, such as a fountain or statue. The combination of shade and sun is essential to make parks useful all year long. Good seating enables park users to watch people walk by. Seating should be interesting and offer some flexibility. People like to move chairs around to "make their own space" Parking cars on the edge of a park is ok, as people hang out there.

Lighting. The charms on the bracelet can be highlighted with lights. Public life should extend to all hours, and soft lighting can provide an exciting way to highlight the system.

Beginnings and endings. Most good urban places need clear beginnings and ends. Such definition offers a sense of the whole, and show how the pieces of the bracelet relate to each other.

Creative approaches to housing

A number of scholars and practitioners have developed creative approaches to address the housing crisis in Boston and other cities. These approaches include efforts to encourage market-based solutions, provide government guidance and direction, and encourage community-based efforts. A sampler:

Cooperative housing. Under limited equity cooperatives, people do not buy housing as individuals or as a long-term investment. They buy shares in a larger community of housing. Their share assures them of a place to live without displacement or spiraling costs. To keep housing costs in check, coop members are not allowed to sell their units at market rates. They buy and sell at the price that reflects production costs, with appropriate adjustments for inflation and maintenance costs. Because of this provision, coops are removed from the booms and busts of the marketplace. Coop boards select members according to their commitment to helping to maintain and operate the building.

The "world-class housing" concept. To reduce the risk to banks and investors, provide a wide range of social services to low- and moderate-income housing developments. Public safety is the most important investment, but must be matched by programs for day care, health care, job training, and substance abuse treatment. By addressing people's critical needs, the housing development creates a more stable environment for investments by banks and other lending institutions, insurance companies, and a wide range of businesses.

Reduce "soft costs" in housing development. By pooling legal and financial expertise, building reliable databases, and banding together to take advantage of government and bank housing resources, cut the overall administrative costs of new housing development. Right now, the so-called "soft" costs of housing development by community development corporations can reach as much as 25 percent of total development costs. Cutting soft costs in half can reduce the cost of development by $10,000 per unit.

Land-lease development. To reduce the overall costs of development, the owners of housing do not actually own the land underneath their building. Instead, they lease the land from the city government at a nominal rate. For years Baltimore boasted some of the nation's most durable and affordable housing because of this arrangement.

Linked development. Raise money for reducing housing costs by leveraging large-scale investments in public transit, hotel and recreational developments, office-building, and other large projects. By tying large-scale development to the need for housing, public agencies can get money for housing that otherwise might not be available. They can also take advantage of the efficiencies of scale. Since the developer is already engaged in a building project, housing can be added without all of the usual up-front costs.

REITs. Real estate investment trusts essentially provide stocks for housing development. People interested in investing in housing as long-term investments buy shares, and the money from their shares is pooled to create large-scale housing and other real-estate developments. REITs tap into investment dollars at a broader scale than is normally found for housing, involving investors who neither live in or manage the units. One problem with REITs is that many investors are skeptical about the long-term benefits of REIT investments. Another problem

is that they encourage high-end, speculative housing rather than projects that meet the needs of low- and moderate-income families.

Transit-centered urban villages. Provide incentives for the placement of dense housing near transit stations, thereby encouraging transit ridership and creating adequate markets for a wide range of goods and services that residents have indicated they desire. A critical element is reducing parking requirements. In the long term, urban-village housing can reduce the demand for larger and larger units that has characterized development in recent years. With more and better amenities located nearby, people would feel less of a need to have numerous entertainment spaces inside their private homes.

SRO's. Historically, cities provided shelter for people with minimal incomes by providing inexpensive single-room occupancy hotels. The SRO's offered few amenities – showers and bathrooms were shared, cooking facilities were minimal, and common spaces were nil – but they did offer sanitary places where low-income people could develop a stable lifestyle. Partly because of gentrification and partly because of concerns about the quality and upkeep of these units, SRO's all but disappeared from cities in the 1980s. But building SRO's at strategic places in the city can help many people avoid homelessness and its associated ills.

Mediation for placement of low income housing placement. In Boston as well as other metropolitan areas, many urban and suburban communities often resist the placement of affordable housing. One result is that low-income housing gets more concentrated in poor communities, creating greater social isolation for people who need to be connected to social networks. Another result is many communities are reluctant to site housing for even middle class residents. Community mediation has proven successful at easing the NIMBY pressures. In the greater metropolitan areas of Hartford and Bridgeport, meditators have negotiated community agreements to build thousands of units of new housing in suburban communities – thereby lessening the housing pressures on urban communities.

Strengthen the "ladder of opportunity" in housing. To encourage community stability and housing choices, provide for a "ladder of opportunity" within the community. Housing experts have long noted the importance of making different types of housing available for people at different stages of their life-cycle. Housing policy should reflect that different kinds of housing – single-room occupancy units, studio apartments, one- and two-bedroom apartments, two- and three-family buildings, attached and detached single-family homes – are desirable at different stages of life. Every community should offer a complete mix of housing choices.

Tax-delay incentives. Delay imposition of property taxes for new developments that serves housing goals and promise greater self-sufficiency in the future. In a variation of tax-increment financing, provide up-front incentives that can be supported in part with the greater economic activity that develops later.

Equity for maintenance. In homes with high rates of equity, develop special tools for converting some of the equity for maintenance and improvement of the home.

CDC collaboratives. In other cities – most notably Pittsburgh – community development corporations combine forces to put pressure on banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions to provide funds for housing development and redevelopment. By pooling their political power, CDC's are able to leverage more money out of banks than would be possible as separate entities.

Cohousing. Develop housing that provides a more communal model of living. Under such a setting, residents share many common spaces – kitchens, cleaning facilities, play areas, child and elder care, theater and TV rooms, and so on – while maintaining enough private space to live

according to their own personal values and habits. By reducing the overall size of individual units, the overall cost of housing declines. The design of common spaces increases the sense of community, provides needed services at reasonable costs, and fosters a greater sense of stability.

Incentives for community engagement. Many inner-city communities have improved the environment for housing and other development with a wide range of community-building efforts undertaken by universities, schools, churches, health centers, and others. The Ten-Point Coalition and Habitat for Humanity are just two such groups. By providing incentives for taxpayers to make donations to these community-building institutions, state and local governments can foster the kind of grassroots activism that creates a viable foundation for housing and community development.

Old-age housing sale benefits. Many senior citizens are property rich but cash poor. One or two people live in homes that are too large for their needs, but lack the money they require to meet everyday needs. Many financial institutions offer programs that give elders cash to spend during their lifetime in exchange for their property at death. Another approach would be for government to provide assistance making the transition from large houses to more manageable units, and for the larger units to be offered to larger families or as parts of multi-family dwellings when appropriate.

Efficient tax assessment. To encourage the owners of vacant parcels and buildings to bring their property on to the market, change the system of the tax assessment to reflect the real market value of the property. The assessment of many properties is limited by its lack of development – so property owners pay just a few hundreds of dollars in property taxes annually. Such low tax payments encourage property owners to speculate – sit on their property until market conditions spur a buyer to pay extraordinary prices for the property. The low assessments do not account for the costs borne by the city and the community for vacant parcels.

Reducing parking requirements. To reduce the overall cost of development and reduce reliance on the automobile, waive parking requirements for housing near transit nodes. Parking reductions can reduce costs by $10,000 or $20,000 per unit – and at the same time create a setting more conducive to transit ridership and community life.

Rehabilitation regulatory relief and incentives. Following New Jersey's innovative approach to rehabilitation of existing buildings, require developers of existing structures to meet basic tests of safety rather than regulatory standards that based on the needs of new structures. New Jersey has seen investments in rehabilitation of inner-city structures almost double in the year since it implemented its new rehab subcode. Other states and cities have begun to implement rehab systems on the New Jersey. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is adapting the code for use nationwide.

Long-term payment plans. Following the model of Japan, where housing prices are so high that most people cannot afford to buy property outright in their own lifetime, long-term payment plans would provide periods greater than the conventional 30 years to pay off their mortgage. Such a system could encourage people to live in one place for a long period, creating a greater commitment to the community.

Elements of a transit-oriented development

(NOTE: *This sidebar will have lots of photos to show how these elements work in different places in Boston.*)

One of the greatest neighborhood resources is a transportation node that centers and organizes a wide range of activities – retail, community services, arts and cultural activities, and recreation. The transit stations act as magnets that draw thousands of people from all over the neighborhood.

The land use design of a transit-centered urban village are critical to its overall success. Each urban village must fit the particular geographic and social characteristics. But a number of principles are useful in enhancing these areas, such as:

A comfortable and accessible environment for pedestrians. A strong urban community requires a human-scale environment that encourages people to venture outside and walk to a wide range of places and activities. A truly "walkable" community requires comfortable sidewalks, safe street crossings, building fronts that provide interesting sights, great civic spaces, meeting places and focal points, and destinations that attract all kinds of people.

Efficient and pleasant use of mass transportation. The transit station connects residents to all of the economic, recreational, and cultural activities that the city offers. This connection should be enhanced with a strong design for the T station and its surrounding area, as well as a citywide intermodal transportation strategy that encourages walking, bicycling, and use of transit and bus services.

Access to a variety of goods and services for residents, merchants, and visitors. The families that live in a neighborhood need to be able to buy the goods and services that are necessary for everyday living. The community should have access to providers of clothing, shoes, groceries, prepared meals, laundromats and dry-cleaning, banking, coffee, books, galleries, CD's and videotapes, and other goods and services. Ideally, these businesses also should supply jobs to residents.

Access to community and family services. Health care and child care should be accessible to all residents in a way that is convenient to the walking city and transit use. In communities all over Boston, health care centers have become a focus of community life – bringing together young and old people of all backgrounds, not only to care for individuals and families but also to coordinate community development strategies. Child care is important for two-worker and single-parent families.

Recreational opportunities for families and children. Recreational opportunities – after-school programs, skating facilities, basketball courts, cinemas, places to meet friends – are essential to the health and wellbeing of young people. For these facilities to play a dynamic role in community life, they need to be connected to streets and sidewalks, schools, libraries, and other civic spaces. Their design should enhance the streetscape; large structures should be located where they will not create a large void along the street.

Housing opportunities for all. All transit areas need a mix of housing types to provide the opportunity to live for people of all household types and economic means. A mix of housing

types not only provides shelter for all, but also supports a full variety of businesses and services in the area.

Goals of a City Housing Policy

Two equally important goals are critical for housing policy in the City: providing affordable housing in every neighborhood for a wide range of households, and using housing projects as lynchpins to a broader process of community enhancement and development.

Affordable housing advocates call for using limited funds to create as many units as possible. High-volume production, wherever and whenever possible, is the objective. The design and placement of these units is less important than the number people being served. Limited government funds should be used to get the biggest "bang for the buck," the greatest number of units per dollar. Housing is viewed as a basic commodity to which all people have a right.

Community development advocates agree that all residents deserve affordable housing, but they maintain that housing is a complex community that has a dramatic effect on the wellbeing of whole communities. Limited housing resources should be used strategically, to strengthen the overall makeup and character of the community. In many cases, it makes sense to spend more money to produce fewer units, if those units can have a dramatic impact on the safety and vitality of the community. Building on existing assets and strategically targeting funds, housing policy can produce an impact that goes beyond the number of units built or rehabilitated. With a powerful multiplier effect, getting the biggest "bang for the buck" is not a matter of building more units, but of creating a built environment where community and market processes can thrive.

The tension between affordable housing and community development makes it difficult to evaluate housing programs with raw statistics. If Boston were to focus its attention solely on building or rehabilitating rental units for as many people as possible, it would not be able to pursue home-building efforts that could revitalize neighborhoods – and vice versa.

Essentially, Boston and other cities with limited resources face a Hobson's choice: Either provide as many units of affordable housing as possible, allowing a decline in many vulnerable neighborhoods . . . or focus efforts on rebuilding neighborhoods, allowing too many people to be shut out of affordable housing.

Breakdown of housing types in Boston

Types of structures (1990 census)	**Number of structures**
Single-family	39,639
2- to 4-family	100,155
Multi-family	107,954
Other	3,115

Maintaining Boston's aging housing stock

In old cities like Boston, maintaining the existing supply of housing is critical to the abundance of housing throughout the city. The old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure applies to housing.

Boston's housing stock is among the oldest in the nation. Code officials have identified a number of specific issues that need attention:

- ✓ Roofs.
- ✓ Windows and doors.
- ✓ Electrical systems.
- ✓ Plumbing.
- ✓ Porches.

Maintaining the integrity of these parts of a home requires constant attention.

One approach is to create housing maintenance cooperatives. Operating like an insurance company, the HMC would provide funds to homeowners to make repairs and improvements on a regular basis. Annual inventories could establish a "work list" for the coming year, with funds drawn from coop accounts.

To encourage participation in housing maintenance cooperatives, banks might offer a quarter- or half-point reduction in interest rates to homebuyers. Such a benefit would both reduce lender risk and lower the costs of maintenance, strengthening the value of the property over time. Some lenders might require participation in an housing maintenance cooperative in order to buy rental properties.

A slight variation on the cooperative approach is the public-interest rehabilitation company. Such a company might pool a wide range of resources to make those resources available at lower cost, similar to the successful Citizens Energy Corporation. In addition to providing subsidized rehab grants, the rehab company might pool finds for purchase of materials, hire experts to provide inspections and advice, and the services of plumbers, roofers, electricians, and others who provide repair work.

Another approach is to offer low-interest loans for all home repair work. Such loans would provide property owners with the resources they need to fix property defects before they diminish the value and integrity of the property.

Under another strategy, the Inspectional Services Department might revise its standards for rehabilitation of existing buildings to make them more economical. Alternatives for plumbing fixtures, shut-off valves for plumbing systems, venting, electrical outlets, and heating systems – which would not compromise the safety or integrity of the structure – could save $2,000 to $4,000 in the rehab of a three-bedroom house.

The importance of housing design

Housing plays two roles in any great city. It provides shelter and enhances the overall quality of the neighborhood. Charles Buki of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation in Washington, D.C., argues that design is critical to the overall success of housing. Excerpts from a publication from the National Housing Institute:

For affordable housing to have any chance of stimulating rejuvenation or being more of a long-term positive influence on a neighborhood than a negative one, it must be well designed. Being affordable but ugly isn't good enough. Being decent but cheap isn't good enough. Affordable housing should win the comparison with what it replaced not only on opening day, but decades later. It should improve the value of adjacent property immediately and over time.

When we build houses that satisfy only minimum aesthetic or durability standards, we undermine neighborhood strength. By designing streets without sufficient pedestrian orientation, we undermine the capacity of people to live as neighbors and the ability of both the young and elderly to participate in society. By planning communities segregated by single use, whether in the outlying suburbs or the inner city, we facilitate an area's tendency to cannibalize itself. …

One of the great absences in low-income communities-beyond the lack of jobs, prosperity, and even hope-is the scarcity of beauty. Most of us have seen so much ugly, decrepit low-income housing that we can't imagine doing anything differently. …

Perhaps two of the finest examples of affordable housing in the last fifty years are in Boston. Both illustrate a public sector agency unwilling to compromise on quality.

The first, Langham Court, designed by Joan Goody, of Goody, Clancy & Associates, contains 84 units of family housing. But the Boston Redevelopment Authority envisioned the project not as 84 units of affordable housing but as a catalyst for neighborhood improvement. In Boston's South End, 84 more units of affordable housing that were ugly or cheap simply would not have achieved this goal.

The design of Langham Court posed several difficulties. The site fronted two avenues, Shawmut and Worcester, each with different architectural characteristics. In my view, a lesser architect working with a CDC whose goal was housing instead of neighborhood improvement would have settled for two buildings, and any attention they may have paid to architectural rhythm would have been manifest in the construction of two competing, not mutually reinforcing, approaches.

Joan Goody combined rowhouses along Worcester and West Springfield with high density apartments along Shawmut, linking them with a breathtaking interior courtyard connected by arches adjacent to the rowhouses. The elegance is unmistakable. Walking north along Worcester, the townhouses are a continuation of the existing form, which connect seamlessly to the higher density segment along Shawmut. It is impossible to recognize Langham Court as affordable housing for low-income people, and the structures reflect the redevelopment agency's goal of using an affordable housing project to stimulate neighborhood improvement.

Also in Boston, the Charlestown Navy Yard Rowhouses are, in my opinion, the best example of the design excellence in affordable housing in the United States, worthy of serious discussion at a national level. Built in an old navy yard, this mixed-income project provides both market rate units and housing affordable to low-income people. The project succeeds architecturally and,

more importantly, in the way it balances competing private and public interests to the substantial benefit of both. …

One community designs its Charm Bracelet

The idea of the charm bracelet – a series of civic spaces connected through landscaping, signage, and strong streetscape design – emerged in Boston 400 community meetings in several different neighborhoods. But it was at a meeting in Mission Hill where residents actually mapped out a vision for their own bracelet.

Mission Hill possesses an abundance of great parks, gardens, schools, and other civic spaces. But many of these places are invisible and unapproachable to many residents and visitors. By using the many different design tools available for urban communities, these places can be made much more visible and accessible for all. Here are the civic sites identified by residents and merchants of Mission Hill for the creation of a charm bracelet in their community.

1. The portal to Mission Hill is **Brigham Circle**. With the growing dominance of the automobile, Brigham Circle has lost its character as a traditional town center. But community efforts to build a new mixed-use development and park at the Ledge Site offer new possibilities for recentering the community. Residents have called for connections between the Brigham and Women's Hospital's inviting green to the proposed new Ledge Site development.
2. The **Longwood Medical and Academic Area** is the second largest employment center in Massachusetts after Downtown Boston. Longwood's thousands of workers offer a strong market for a wide range of goods and services in the area.
3. The smallest historic district in the City of Boston, **the Mission Hill Triangle Historic District**'s architecture, exemplified by Wigglesworth Street, combines the stateliness of the South End with the intimacy of Beacon Hill. Being so small, institutional development easily encroaches upon the area from Huntington Avenue, Longwood, and Tremont Street. Future development should respect the integrity of this architectural treasure by with appropriate scale and design.
4. Anchored by Brigham Circle and Roxbury Crossing, **Tremont Street** is Mission Hill's Main Street. Lined with retail shops interspersed with homes and apartments and benefits from a pedestrian-friendly design, Tremont struggles to deal with high traffic volumes and speeds. The Boston Transportation Department is studying the possibility of redirecting traffic to parallel streetsReconstructed under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Hope IV program, Mission Main will offer a variety of civic spaces as well as a stronger stock of housing.
5. The **Mission Church** is a landmark for the whole community. As well as providing religious programs and housing for the elderly, the church offers space for a wide variety of community activities.
6. Right next to the Mission Church, the **Mission Hill Playground** is the geographic center of a cluster of community resources. But the design of this area undermines the connections between the playground, the Parker Hill branch of the Boston Public Library, the community center, the church, and the nearby schools. Redesigning automobile access, eliminating fences between the facilities, and adding pathways with better sightlines would greatly improve the connections among these resources.
7. Anchoring Tremont Street and providing reliable and convenient access to Downtown Boston and Forest Hills, the **Roxbury Crossing T station** has the potential to support strong development and connect to local resources. Located across from Roxbury Community College,

the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center, and several public schools, Roxbury Crossing is an ideal location for mixed-use development that combines small-scale retail businesses with housing.

8. Running along the entire eastern edge of the neighborhood, the **Southwest Corridor** provides a place for many recreational activities in addition to multi-modal transportation access via the Orange Line subway, and dedicated pedestrian and bicycle paths.

9. The **Gibbons Playground** and nearby community gardens provide a place fopr neighbors to stop for a brief pause in the daily rounds.

10. At a critical edge between Mission Hill and Jackson Square, **General Heath Square**'s redesign has the potential to offer a landmark for people arriving from Columbus Avenue, the Southwest Corridor, and Heath Street. With a careful strategy of "traffic calming" to slow traffic and make the area safer for the pedestrians and bicyclists, Heath Square could become a critical neighborhood node.

11. A redesign of adjoining **Parker Street**, which overlooks the historic brewery buildings, could provide a strong pedestrian connection to McLaughlin Playground.

12. Residents have suggested that improvements be made to **McLaughlin Park** to make it their "Boston Common." McLaughlin could accommodate both active and passive recreation for people of all ages and backgrounds. The park's terraces, existing pathways, and spectacular skyline views provide an excellent base for a redesign that accommodates numerous active uses and takes advantage of the park's hilltop location. Nearby New England Baptist Hospital is an architectural treasure as well as the owner of the Meadow, a popular urban wild.

13. The **Hayden Street steps** once provided access between Heath Street and Lawn Street. The steps were closed off a number of years ago and have become overgrown and impassible. Residents have called for the steps to be restored to bring back a treasured pathway.

14. Recently reconstructed through the Boston Schoolyards Initiative, **the Hennigan School and Community Center** offers a safe place for children of all ages to play.

15. The nearby **Jefferson Playground** is literally off the beaten path and requires a better connection to lead passersby from Heath Street.

16. The **Heath Street "T" stop**, the terminus for the E-branch of the Green Line trolley, has the potential to provide a pedestrian-friendly and active public space. Defining the edges of the Veterans Administration Hospital, providing pedestrian-friendly amenities, and redesigning the station itself would greatly improve the station and its surroundings.

17. The **Back of the Hill Urban Wild** lies near the Bricklayers housing development on Heath Street, just off South Huntington Avenue.

18. An important gateway to Mission Hill, Boston, and the Emerald Necklace, the **intersection of Huntington and South Huntington Avenues** is currently disorienting and unattractive to residents and visitors. To become one of the city's great gateways, this intersection needs public realm improvements and infill development that make strong connections to the Emerald Necklace, Brigham Circle, and the Avenue of the Arts.

Elements of a neighborhood park

The neighborhood park is a critical element in the overall design of the charm bracelet.

Neighborhood parks must do three things well – attract people, engage users, and connect with nearby community spaces and activities. Parks should be pleasant places for all people at all times.

Here are some principles of small park design that neighborhoods should consider when designing parks as key elements of charm bracelets:

Gateways – Entering the park should always be an event – a moment that helps make a transition from the world of urban life to the world of nature and recreation. Good gateways provide a focal point that attracts people from the outside and orients people into the park.

Access – Parks should be accessible — for all people, regardless of abilities — from all different directions. People need to be able to enter on one side and leave on another. Many entrances and paths provide the most important element in any public space: choice.

Edges – The periphery of a civic space marks clear boundaries, and at the same time connects that space to the surrounding area. The best edges enable people to see inside and outside when they want, but also separate themselves so they can concentrate on what they are doing.

Articulation of space – Parks exist for many different reasons, and the spaces inside a park should make it clear what some of the options are. Here you can sit with a friend, there you can take a walk or jog, over there you can watch kids climb on play equipment.

Seating areas – Parks should be full of places to sit. If people can find respite, even if for just a few minutes, they are likely to be pulled into the life of the park. Chairs, benches, ledges, rocks, picnic tables, fences, play equipment, and trees all offer places to sit or lean.

Play and other outdoors equipment – Children need to exercise their limbs and lungs. Well-designed play equipment offers kids a place to play alone or in groups of two or more. Parents need a place to sit and watch.

Lighting – Many parks are off-limits after dark. But well-designed lighting can help extend the park's usable time by hours. Many parks have playing fields, bandstands, and other facilities for public events that occur after dark, and lighting is essential to make it all work.

Paths – Well-designed paths should bring the user from one significant point to another. Wherever you are along a path, you should be able to see the another major focal point. Paths constructed with hard surfaces protect walkers from mud and dust and allow easy maintenance.

Protection from the elements – On hot days, people need shade. On cold days, they need exposure to the sun and protection from the wind. All parks should offer gradations of exposure to the sun, wind, rain, and snow. Trees provide the best canopy. Well-designed paths protect from puddles.

Monuments and art – The obvious purpose of monuments and art is to provide delight and education to the viewer, and to express civic and aesthetic ideals. A less obvious purpose is to serve as landmarks to orient people to the park's different spaces. They also offer great meeting places.

Amenities – Drinking fountains, bulletin boards, toilets, and pushcarts all provide people with the "extras" they need to make a visit to the park comfortable. Each of these amenities should have a strict program of maintenance.

Accessibility for the disabled – Parks are the ultimate public places, and so they must be accessible to everyone. People with disabilities have as much need to get outdoors in civic spaces as anyone else. Parks should invite handicapped people as generously as they invite everyone else in the community.

Recent improvements to the City's neighborhood parks

The City of Boston has directed a $120-million, ten-year capital rehabilitation campaign that has transformed a once derelict park system into an attractive asset – one that has helped underpin the City's ongoing revitalization. The Parks Department has worked with neighborhood residents to create new parks, renovate existing ones, and continue the restoration of the famed Emerald Necklace and other historic parks.

Here are a few of the more recent projects in that ten-year campaign.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

East Boston Stadium at East Boston Memorial Park underwent $1.7 million in improvements and was named James A. Sartori Stadium in honor of the late chief probation officer for East Boston District Court. This state-of-the-art athletic facility features the city's first artificial turf soccer and football field, a completely resurfaced six-lane running track, a multi-event pole vault/shot put/discus/long jump area, a new scoreboard, three new flagpoles, new timing equipment, and improved drainage systems. The artificial turf installed at the stadium is Diamond 12, the same product used by professional and collegiate sports facilities.

The South End's Ringgold Park was renovated to reflect the current needs and wishes of the surrounding community. A full-scale basketball court that once dominated the site has been replaced by a more inclusive and intergenerational balance of recreational facilities including state-of-the-art play lots for children, a half-court basketball facility, and expanded walkways, seating, and landscaping. In keeping with the neighborhood's historic character, lighting, fencing, and site furnishings were developed with a Victorian theme.

The recently renovated Doherty Playground in Charlestown is one of several Olmsted-designed parks that lie outside of the Emerald Necklace. Located on steep topography in a highly dense inner core neighborhood, this historic park's signature granite and stone stairways, sinuous pathways, and billowy masses of shrubs was renovated with assistance from the state Urban Self-Help program. Together with matching funds from the City Capital Improvement Program, this grant helped accelerate the original historic restoration construction schedule of this scenic park.

Copp's Hill Terrace, the North End park created by Olmsted associate Charles Eliot, features a medieval terrace with massive walls, steps, and wrought iron crenellation. This outstanding overlook to the harbor and the U.S.S. Constitution was renovated with over $480,000, earmarked to rebuild walls and stairways and plant new trees.

In Dorchester, the Parks Department improved the pathways and landscape of Savin Hill. First used as a Revolutionary War lookout site, Savin Hill still offers a commanding view of the Outer Harbor. This first phase restoration was based on previous master planning work completed in 1995. Similar improvements were made to McLaughlin Playground on Mission Hill, where a first phase restoration of the "vertical meadow" established new plantings to stabilize the steep slope and offer seasonal interest and wildlife habitat along Fisher Avenue. Pedestrian pathway restorations has also begun.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE EMERALD NECKLACE

The Boston Common Frog Pond four-season recreational facility has both illuminated and animated a previously dark corner of the park. Featuring a 16,000-square-foot ice skating surface operable in temperatures up to 55 degrees, the Frog Pond welcomes visitors with a new pavilion housing concessions, Zamboni storage, rest rooms, an office, and a warming area for skaters. The facility opened on January 24, 1997.

This $4-million facility was a high priority of the Mayor to provide recreational activities to children and enhance the economic potential of the downtown. In early summer the Frog Pond converts for warm weather use into a wading pool with a 70-foot-high spray fountain, while in spring and fall it acts as a shallow reflecting pool. During the 1997-98 season, the Frog Pond rink averaged 7,400 skaters per week. Of the skaters surveyed, 57 percent were from Boston, 32 percent from other towns and cities in Massachusetts, and the remaining 11 percent were visitors from other parts of the United States and from countries around the world.

As part of continuing the revitalization of America's oldest public open space, the City also restored Boston Common's historic Parkman Bandstand. A landmark since its construction in 1912, the bandstand was named in honor of George F. Parkman (1823-1908), a Boston philanthropist who willed $5 million for improvements to Boston's parks. A neoclassical pavilion constructed of a granite base with a terrazzo floor and pink marble columns, cornice, and dome, Parkman Bandstand underwent $1 million in improvements to the surrounding lawn, benches, drainage systems, tree plantings, and brick pathways. The City of Boston celebrated the beloved building's return to active use by presenting the six-week-long Parkman Bandstand Performing Arts Festival in partnership with Emerson College.

The Abbey Group's pending development of the Sears Building in the Fenway returned a long-lost piece of the Emerald Necklace. In March of 1998, the former Sears parking lot was re-deeded to the City of Boston by Sears, Roebuck and Co. as part of the redevelopment of the landmark art deco building on the corner of Brookline Avenue and Park Drive. With great media fanfare, the parking lot pavement was removed and grass and trees installed to celebrate this monumental reconnection of the Necklace.

In the Back Bay Fens, Mother's Rest was transformed from a traditional design providing benches, shade and a view for "motherhood relief," to a contemporary children's play lot circumscribed by a vine-covered fence and punctuated with two ornamental gates which feature architectural ivy. For access to the site, a new granite stairway with a fanciful ornamental handrail was created, modeled after the Olmsted-designed pathways and railings at Niagara Falls, New York.

Further south in the Olmsted Park section of the Necklace, the Department created a cedar boardwalk along the Perkins Street end of the park. This new walk allows for perambulation along the edge of Wards Pond – further improving the Necklace's "connectedness" – and offers a close-up look at pond and wetland plant species.

Two prominent places in Franklin Park received a renewed look. The historic ruin at Schoolmaster Hill, named after poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, was fully stabilized, cleaned, and enhanced with historic plantings. A dedication to celebrate the completion of this work featured a reading of Emerson by local actor and narrator Will Lyman, including the appropriate quotation: "The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon."

From the promontory of Schoolmaster Hill, the new 10,000-square-foot Franklin Park Golf Clubhouse can be seen. Opened on October 14, 1998, the $3.4 million clubhouse celebrates the citizen golfer – the men and women who worked hard for many years to revive the public golf

course in the heart of the city. The clubhouse features a shingled exterior, granite foundation, soaring cathedral ceiling, wood-burning fireplace, custom trophy cases, storage for 70 golf carts, men's and women's locker rooms with showers and changing areas, function room, pro shop, full professional kitchen, and landscaping including new sod, trees, shrubs, pathways, and an outdoor patio with seating for 32. Funding was provided by the City Capital Improvement Program, and the project administered through a collaborative effort of the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Mayor's Office of Capital Budgeting, and the Parks and Recreation Department.

CITY SQUARES

East Boston's Central Square received a facelift that has revived its Victorian flair. Framed by its restored iron fence, new and rejuvenated trees, and rehabilitated benches, the two circular beds of bulbs, evergreens, and perennial flowers bring year-round color to this park at the heart of the neighborhood's shopping district. Charlestown's Sullivan Square, one of the principal gateways to the city and soon to be totally rebuilt, received an interim landscape treatment of ornamental grasses and native shrubs.

In the South End, the Parks Department worked with residents to address issues of their historic squares. For Chester Square, a design charrette was held to create schematic plans showing what could be developed if Massachusetts Avenue was rerouted through a tunnel under the park. Concord Square received a Browne Fund grant to restore its historic fence and fountain in conjunction with infrastructure and landscape improvements to be made by the Department. Neighborhood residents and the Parks Department's landscape contractor worked together to replant Rutland Square, paint the fence, and rejuvenate the trees.

Working with community residents, the Department oversaw a major redesign of Harriet Tubman Square, another South End square. Gone is the old sunken plaza that invited disreputable uses; replacing it is an at-grade design that prominently features both a new cast iron fence in keeping with the historic neighborhood character, and two bronze sculptures by African-American Bostonians, Fern Cunningham and the late Meta Warrick Fuller. Cunningham's sculpture, "Step on Board," (1999) memorializes Tubman's work on the Underground Railroad. Fuller's "Emancipation Proclamation" (1913) depicts the plight of freed slaves 50 years after the Civil War.

Other South End squares also received attention toward restoration. A dialog was begun with residents of Braddock Park to determine the direction of future landscape improvements, while the ongoing partnership with the Franklin and Blackstone Squares Association was strengthened by joint efforts to secure funding for landscape improvements.

Boston's models of transit-oriented development

All over Boston, a number of transit nodes provide models for transit-centered development. These centers of activity vary greatly, underscoring the need to tailor land-use and urban design standards to fit the needs of each center. Among Boston's notable transit centers:

The New England Aquarium. Once isolated from its immediate vicinity, the Aquarium has made a number of improvements to its open plaza to improve connections to the Blue Line station. With the removal of the elevated Central Artery, the spaces between the Aquarium and the Financial District can be developed to create better connections.

Downtown Crossing. With its severe restrictions on automobiles, Downtown Crossing has become one of Boston's most diverse places to walk and explore. Located just one block from Boston Common, Downtown Crossing has one of the greatest concentrations of shopping activity in the city. Advocates for the district, which includes a number of offices and a growing number of restaurants, say that increasing housing density is critical to making the community a 24-hour neighborhood. The improvements to Washington Street, including the Millennium Place development, take full advantage of superior transit connections at Downtown Crossing and several nearby stops.

Park Street. The Park Street T is the premier transit mode for all of Boston, but the surrounding areas has become attractive and vibrant in recent years.

Copley Square. For more than a century, Copley Square has been a true civic center for Boston's Back Bay. Historic churches, the Boston Public Library, a diverse shopping district, a major convention center, well landscaped parks, lively restaurants and pubs, and the nearby Prudential Center provide numerous activities within walking distance. The streetscape has evolved to become interesting place for urban explorers. Perhaps the greatest improvement has been Copley Square itself, once a lifeless sunken plaza but now one of the greatest gathering spots during temperate months. Plans to close Dartmouth Street to traffic could further enhance the pedestrian character of the area and foster connections between Trinity Church and the library.

Kenmore Square. Located at the heart of Boston University, Kenmore Square has cleaned up its storefronts to provide a more attractive streetscape for residents and visitors alike. The redesign of the T station and bus turn-around should make the area safer and more attractive. Traffic along Commonwealth Avenue, which also feeds into Beacon Street, creates a difficult challenge.

Stops along the Green Line's B and C trunks. Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street provide numerous nodes of commercial activity near trolley stops. These clusters of businesses along the trolley lines include restaurants, furniture stores, convenience stores, services such as dry cleaners and real estate brokers, and movie houses. Although these stops often do not constitute full-fledged transit communities, they get their special character from the T lines.

Utility cars

At its best, the automobile offers greater convenience and flexibility than any other amenity of modern life. At its worst, the automobile creates clogged streets, undermines the continuity of urban landscapes, chokes the air with pollution – and reduces people's willingness to use mass transit.

Critics of the automobile point to an urban landscape that has been compromised by the needs of the car – highways that overwhelm neighborhoods, garages and surface lots, malls, and drive-through eateries. Pedestrians are less and less safe as the volumes and speeds of traffic increase. Many poor and working-class people cannot afford to buy and maintain a car – and therefore lose out on opportunities for jobs, education, and cultural activities.

Perhaps most important, a real sense of urban community requires people to get out of their car and walk to places in their neighborhood. When people are dependent on the car to meet basic needs – access to jobs, shopping, and friends and family – they do not get to know their own neighborhood well. The neighborhood becomes a community of strangers.

The best way to make people less reliant on the automobile is to provide alternatives.

The traditional alternative is mass transit. If people can get around the city and region on a trolley, train, or bus – conveniently – they will not rely so much on cars. People will avoid cars especially during rush hours, reducing the overall level of congestion.

For mass transit to be an attractive alternative, it needs to be fast, reliable, and comfortable. Trains and buses have to come when you need them. Reaching a destination must entail no more than one transfer. The station and surrounding area must protect patrons from the weather and provide amenities like benches, newspapers, and convenience shopping.

Other alternatives to car ownership and dependence include bicycles, van shuttles, and walking.

But another alternative might be just as important as public transit. That alternative is known as the "station car" or "utility car."

The station car operates on the principle that everyone occasionally needs the convenience of the car but few people want to be dependent on the car for every trip. The car should be a matter of convenience, not necessity. People should be able to get a car when they need one, but be free of the hassle when they do not need one.

Under the station-car concept, every neighborhood would offer a garage filled with many different kinds of cars that people could take out when they needed. A trip to a lumber yard might require a pickup truck. A weekend outing to the beach or a trip to the grocery store might require a station wagon. A day at the beach might mean a sports car.

Members of the station-car co-op would use an access card similar to a credit card to get the car of their choice. Just show up, get a car, and return it. Charges would be automatically assessed according to the kind of car, the time of use, the mileage, the driver's safety record, and other relevant factors. Everyone in the community would have access to a car at all times without needing to bear the expenses of ownership – and without burdening the community with excessive traffic. Best of all, the car would be understood as a matter of convenience, not necessity.

The station car eventually could be connected to a number of transportation innovations such as an electronic highway guidance system.

Moshe Safdie, the former director of graduate urban design at Harvard University, outlines the advantage of what he called the utility car:

"From a purely economic point of view, the cost to an individual per mile would be less than operating his or her own vehicle. But the most appealing, most seductive, most compelling aspect of the U-car is pure and simple, the fulfillment of a longtime promise of cars: the carefree life. To have it at our disposal at any time; to have the freedom of mind not to worry about it and the physical freedom to get rid of it; and not to incur the cost of it when we do not need it – this indeed would be liberation."(p. 144, *The City After the Automobile*).

If designed well – like the new Central Artery garage on Congress Street between North and Sudbury Streets – the station-car garage could contribute to the aesthetic quality of the neighborhood.

Without having to spend so much on car travel, people would be less inclined to use the car for all their travel needs. They would be more open to other modes of transportation. The car would be one of many modes of transportation, not always the first choice.